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STRETCHED THIN, LIED TO & MISTREATED

ON THE GROUND WITH U.S. TROOPS IN IRAQ

by CHRISTIAN PARENTI

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LETTERS

R.O. BLECHMAN

'Slugs'? I Don't Think So!

We were peppered with volleys of mail from the young, and others, responding to Thomas Geoghegan's "Dems—Why Not Woo the Young?" [July 21/28]. Letter-writers from 18 to 52 (almost all gave their age) found the editorial to be everything from "thoughtful" and "heartfelt" to "outrageous," "condescending," "insulting," "snotty elitist crap," "denigrating to community colleges," "relying on stereotypes" of youth, jumping on the "tiresome sixties nostalgia bus" and "as outmoded as fainting couches and arranged marriages." Tracy Goode of Tucson is "offended that Geoghegan thinks my vote can be so easily bought," while Amalia Anderson of Decorah, Iowa, declares, "I for one will not *be wooed." (Several young letter-writers denied that they are "slugs.") —The Editors*

Los Angeles

■ As a 24-year-old, I was happy to read Thomas Geoghegan's appeal to Democrats to pay more attention to the needs of the young, if only for electoral purposes. Material issues like student loans and college tuition are clearly very important. However, addressing them will do little to win back the active involvement of young people. In these times of authoritarian *Terminator*-style government, it is too easy to blame the young for being indifferent (or for not reading *The Nation*, for that matter). What we need is inspiration: a leader who does not follow the Republicans in injecting this country with fear and polarization, and who shows that politics can change the world in progressive ways. And who is not too proud to look at Europe for examples (both the voter turnout and the political awareness of Europe's young embarrass the United States). WEI JI MA

Minneapolis

■ I agree with Thomas Geoghegan's premise that the Democrats should begin paying more attention to the issues facing American youth. However, his stated purpose for such attention (more votes for the Dems) and his suggested target issue (college loans) need to be refocused. The young do not need attention for the purpose of winning elections; they need it because they are an important part of our society (this includes those *under* 18 too). Using young people merely as an electoral tool is a good way to disengage them. And, while college loans are important, it is safe to bet that a sizable portion of those youth Geoghegan notices on the El are not as interested in post–high school financial matters as they are in more immediate concerns (proper food, shelter, safety, etc.). Perhaps when Democrats begin to see youth for the achievements and worth they do have, as well as the challenges they face, the *young* will start to woo the *Dems*. SETH ZLOTOCHA

Seattle

■ Thomas Geoghegan was technically correct when he said that "at least one candidate, John Edwards, seems to get it" about wooing the young vote. Geoghegan unfortunately didn't report that Dennis Kucinich also "seems to get it." In fact, Kucinich goes much further than Edwards with his plan to provide college education for the young in this country. Kucinich would reverse the Bush tax cuts and use that money to fund college for all. Not just freshman year, not just senior year. All four years. More information about Kucinich's views is at www.kucinich.us. WHITNEY NEUFELD-KAISER

Lincoln, Mass.

■ Has Thomas Geoghegan been in hibernation since the 1960s? Plenty of youth activism and civic engagement have occurred in the three decades since, and we were driven by idealism—not the cynical, materialist issues with which he proposes to "woo" us back to the polls. Apartheid, sweatshops and global free trade also "did not affect many of us in a direct or material way," which he claims of Vietnam and civil rights (rather dubiously), yet they have drawn thousands of us out of our dorms and into administration buildings—not to mention the streets of Seattle, New York and Washington—with striking results!

If we learned one thing, it's that direct action works. Voting once every four years for a President is the most passive, ineffective form of civic participation one could encourage in anyone, least of all idealistic youth. It will take a lot more than enticements of free tuition for us to back the Dems. Yes, college should be publicly financed, but so should elections! Only then can we win the free healthcare, universal living wages, decent public transportation, consumer protections and serious environmental laws, for example, that we need for a more humane society for *our* children.

With a platform like that, we just might "click" *on*. AARON JOHNSON (25)
LEE PALMER (24)

Baltimore

■ As a 22-year-old anxiously waiting to vote for someone, anyone not Bush in 2004, I disagree with Thomas Geoghegan's assessment of people my age. I agree that too few of us vote, but plenty of us do, and do so passionately. I see decreasing voter turnout as a national issue that afflicts all generations. To assume that young voters cannot be galvanized unless issues like loan debts are "pitched" to us is to grossly underestimate us. Though I agree that college should be free, I feel there is a flood of more pertinent issues right now, including the corporate merging of the media, the ineffective war on drugs and our ridiculously backward foreign policy.

Yet, call me crazy, I am optimistic, and I'm getting a feeling that people my age are pretty pissed about our current government. Many people I know who didn't vote in 2000 have already registered and can't wait to whup some Bush ass next year. I'm excited about the change I see; more and more of us are waking up to the fact that the people who run this country couldn't care less about the public interest. And we're getting active. KATIE RUBRIGHT

Madison, Wisc.

■ As a graduate student who teaches undergrads, I disagree with Thomas Geoghegan's claims of lack of interest from this age group. Ask Representative Tammy Baldwin. UW-Madison students are one of the main reasons she holds her office. She constantly comes to campus to discuss issues with her constituents and recruits students to work in her campaign.

What the Democrats need to do, as Geoghegan points out, is demonstrate how their vision of America will assist students to become people who are not burdened by debt, can find a decent job and be part of a society that is not so divided by race, class, sexual orientation and gender. One of best resources is the Internet—as Howard Dean has shown. If Democrats were to tie in issues that young people are concerned about with web pages that hold their interest—bands, shopping, sports, etc.—they could generate a lot of interest. CHRISTOPHER BROWN

Grants Pass, Ore.

■ Woo the young not with college debt forgiveness but jobs that pay. Most young people are not college-bound and are trying to piece together a living with nonunion, underpaying jobs. Many have become entangled in credit card entrapments and are facing economic ruin at an early age because the jobs they can get are dead end and their consumer appetites outstrip their means to pay. If Democrats returned to being the party for the underpaid and benefitless, they might find a voice among the young—a very loud voice. Yes, these kids have spent unwisely; but they also founder without strong unions or businesses that offer solid jobs. Democrats need to get corporations and all businesses behind an increase in the minimum wage and challenge them to create futures for their young workers rather than turn them into part-time employees that go from job to job. RALPH BOWMAN

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EDITORIALS

A New Economic Agenda

Two questions will dominate the 2004 presidential campaign: how to make the United States secure in an age of terror, and how to get the economy to work for all Americans. George W. Bush's responses have been to call for unilateral pre-emptive wars and high-end tax cuts. With US soldiers continuing to die in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the President presiding over the worst job contraction since the Great Depression, voters are starting to look for better answers. In the first primary debate, Democratic presidential candidates argued alternatives to the Bush war doctrine and the Iraq debacle. The next official debate, on September 25, will focus on the economy. It comes as the Administration hails the economy's sputtering revival. But even with renewed growth, Bush is likely to be the first President since Herbert Hoover to end his first term having lost rather than produced jobs.

Democratic candidates should lay out a clear critique of Bush's failures and an alternative growth agenda. The main problem with Bush's economic policies is not the deficits per se but what produced them: primarily tax cuts for the wealthy and the pre-emptive wars. America would have been far better served if we'd invested that money in education, energy independence, vital infrastructure and domestic security needs. These would have put Americans to work, avoided destructive cuts of school programs now cascading through the states and prevented long-term fiscal imbalance.

The Democratic candidates must also address the unsustainable $500 billion annual trade deficit, which records a hemorrhaging of jobs in the manufacturing, high-tech and service industries. Vulnerable on this key issue, Bush is now rolling out a public relations campaign—starting with the appointment of a "jobs czar" in the Commerce Department—to show he cares. Democrats should go beyond such gestures to serious policy proposals. It is one sign of progress that major Democratic candidates now pledge to support future trade accords only if they protect labor rights and the environment.

But what is needed more fundamentally is the articulation of a new form of globalization that is worker-centered, not corporate-centered. Rather than try to ram through another round of corporate trade treaties that will only accelerate the race to the bottom (an effort now at least made more difficult by the collapse of the WTO talks in Cancún), the United States should work with the industrial nations and the South group headed by Brazil to erase burdensome Third World debts (which will never be repaid) and to increase the buying power of workers here and abroad, thus stimulating global growth from the bottom up.

Democrats should also stop biting their tongues about the alarming growth of inequality and poverty, which has reached Gilded Age extremes. They should combine a campaign for fair taxes with a growth strategy based on empowering workers—not paying off millionaires. A good start would be a national living wage that would enable full-time workers to lift their families out of poverty, combined with a right to organize that would let workers create a union simply by signing up—rather than through elections corrupted by corporate intimidation.

Finally, Democrats must address support systems that are essential to basic security in a changing global economy, starting with alternatives to a broken healthcare system whose costs are soaring. With the largest wave of kids hitting the schools since the baby boom, likely the largest wave of teacher retirements ever and schools that are decrepit and overcrowded, the country needs a recommitment to public education at all levels: more early-childhood education programs; more schools; initiatives to recruit and train teachers and to insure that universities are not priced out of reach of most Americans. On pensions, retirement security, paid vacations, overtime pay, workplace safety, clean air and water—

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the whole range of what Paul Wellstone called "kitchen-table issues"—Bush has systematically sided with the top floor over the shop floor. By politicizing September 11 and wrapping himself in the flag, Bush has deflected attention from his failed economic policies. If he is to be challenged successfully in 2004, Democratic candidates must speak boldly about a new economic course.

Recall Recalls 2000

The tangled web that a narrow Supreme Court majority wove to shut down the Florida recount of presidential ballots in December 2000 made it possible for Republican George W. Bush to secure the presidency. But that precedent could make it impossible for California Republicans to game the system with a hastily scheduled recall of Democratic Governor Gray Davis. Though the High Court framed its decision in the 2000 *Bush v. Gore* case as a one-of-a-kind ruling, the majority opinion broke new legal ground in determining that the Constitution's equal protection clause, which protects citizens from disparate treatment by state officials, can be applied to the methods states use to tally votes. It was on the basis of that interpretation that a three-judge panel of the Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit delayed California's recall election.

California counties currently have different voting systems, and some of them still employ the flawed punch-card machines that denied the franchise to so many Floridians. The appeals court ruled that it would be unacceptable to allow the election to be held before key counties—several with large minority populations—carry out a planned replacement of the those machines, thus reducing the risk that ballots cast in those counties would be discarded at higher rates than in counties with better systems.

The panel's ruling (which as we went to press faced a possible review by the full Ninth Circuit and potentially a Supreme Court review) points again to the desperate need for Congress to set iron-clad standards for assuring that every vote counts and that every vote is counted. Until that happens, litigation will continue, voters will continue to be treated differently based on where they live, and the promise of American democracy will remain unfulfilled.

A New Start in Cancún

The collapse of the WTO talks in Cancún is in fact a profoundly hopeful turn of events. The developing nations have found their voice—and power. Led by Brazil and including both India and China, the "Group of 22" made it clear that while they recognize the necessity of global rules on trade and investment, they want those rules written to benefit their citizens, not the multinationals that have virtually dictated trade policy for the past thirty years.

Cancún also marked another step in the development of global citizen activism. Farmers, students and union activists from Mexico and other parts of the global South were not only in the streets but in the seminars; showing a growing sophistication about tactics, they lobbied officials and educated the press.

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EDITORIALS

We can expect the powerful, starting with the United States, to resist change aggressively. But politicians in the advanced countries should see what has happened as a chance to restart the process of globalization in a way that works for all. Many are ready to consider alternatives, according to Congressman Sherrod Brown, who points to the size of the no vote in the House in July on two bilateral free-trade pacts with Singapore and Chile. "There is a consensus that free trade is not working," Brown said during a visit to the *Nation* offices on the day after the WTO collapse. The next big battleground will be the Free Trade Area of the Americas agreement—opponents call it "NAFTA on steroids"—which the Administration wants approved next year.

Cancún, as Ecuadorean delegate Ivonne Juez de Baki observed, is "not the end," as WTO supporters termed it. Instead, "it's the beginning of a better future for everyone."

To read a report by Christian Parenti on events in the streets of Cancún, go to www.thenation.com.

COMMENT

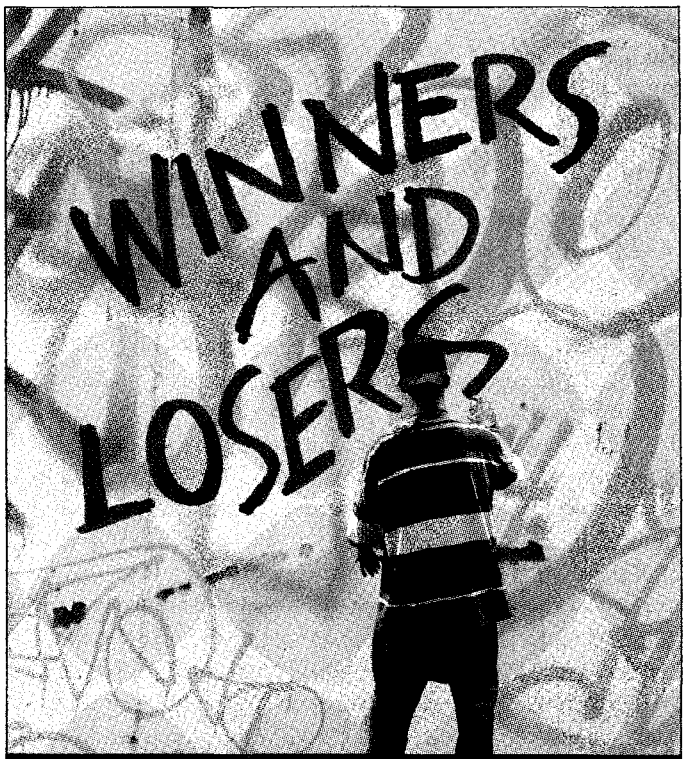
Enter the General

ELECTION MATTERS

When activists began cobbling together a Draft Wesley Clark for President campaign, their Internet initiative looked to be longer on idealism than pragmatism. George W. Bush's approval ratings were as high as his dad's in 1991 and the Democratic Party had a glut of senators, congressmen and political hangers-on who were willing to lose gracefully in 2004. But Clark, who traded his Army general's uniform to become an outspoken if not always consistent critic of the Bush Administration's military adventurism, seemed interested. So his enthusiasts persisted in believing that if they built a campaign, the general would run.

They were right. Clark elbowed his way onto the Democratic field just in time to overshadow the showy announcement that North Carolina Senator John Edwards hoped would revitalize his hapless campaign. The timing serves as a reminder that Clark is no political innocent. He let front-runners stumble, watched second-tier campaigns flail and waited patiently for evidence that Bush was beatable while his supporters created a turnkey campaign. Clark is not starting late. Rather, he is taking command of an army of volunteers that has organized in fifty states, established networks of local coordinators in Iowa and New Hampshire, and collected commitments for $1.5 million in campaign contributions. And he has attracted to his campaign a cadre of former aides to Bill Clinton and Al Gore, proving that the former NATO commander is anything but an outsider.

Clark was ushered into the race by a political odd couple. Clinton, who was President when Clark was commander of NATO's Kosovo air war, said of his friend of four decades, "He is brilliant, brave and good. And he's got a sack full of guts." Filmmaker Michael Moore, who in 1999 condemned the bombing of Kosovo, circulated an open letter urging Clark to run and arguing that "we, the people, need a general to beat back those who have abused our Constitution and our basic sense of decency." Like Clinton,



A Debate on the Future of Globalization

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Economics Correspondent for *The Economist*

William Greider
National Affairs Correspondent for *The Nation*

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however, Moore stopped short of an endorsement.

There are still doubts about Clark. He has a reputation as a hothead whose clashes with superiors and allies in Kosovo reportedly cost him his command. And his appearances as a TV commentator never marked him as the antiwar firebrand some reporters now describe (see www.fair.org/press-releases/clark-antiwar.html and *Nation* editor Katrina vanden Heuvel at www.thenation.com/edcut). Then there's the matter of his doorstep appeal—will a take-charge general have the patience to listen to an Iowa farmer explain ethanol?—and his yet-to-be-established domestic agenda.

There is no doubt, however, that Clark is a phenomenon. He is already messing with the race's other Vietnam veteran, John Kerry. And lots of grassroots Democrats really do believe that General Clark will be National Guard deserter George Bush's nightmare.

But can Clark appeal enough to the party's base to derail front-runner Howard Dean and the others? He'll get points for describing the Iraq war as "a classic presidential-level misjudgment." He's pro-choice, pro–affirmative action and anti–Patriot Act. He launched his campaign saying he would "hold the Administration accountable" on jobs, the deficit, security fears and civil liberties. Republicans take comfort in the notion that Democrats won't nominate a former general. But Wisconsin Lieutenant Governor Barbara Lawton, an "unrepentant progressive" who has met with Clark, says, "He sounds progressive. And he sounds like a winner. It may be late, but it's not too late for Democrats to consider someone who offers them that combination." JOHN NICHOLS

Taking Sides

ELECTION MATTERS

Democrats who want to deny Howard Dean the party's 2004 presidential nomination have a new issue: They are complaining that the front-runner is insufficiently unequivocal in his support for Israel. But the criticisms have more to do with domestic politics than international affairs, and members of Congress who attack Dean's relatively moderate statements regarding relations between Israel and Palestine are signaling that it is no easier to debate Middle East policy in the Democratic Party than in George Bush's GOP.

The controversy started with Dean's September 3 statement that if the United States wants to get Israel and Palestine to the negotiating table, "it's not our place to take sides." Dean's self-described "evenhanded" approach was hardly radical, nor was his echoing of Israeli moderates when he said that "enormous numbers of [Israeli] settlements" on the West Bank and Gaza Strip must be removed in order to achieve peace. Yet Dean's foes responded as if he had endorsed Hamas. Connecticut Senator Joe

In Fact . . .

ANOTHER WIN FOR MEDIA DEMOCRACY

■ Take that, Rupert Murdoch! Invoking its authority to "veto" decisions of regulatory agencies, the Senate voted 55 to 40 to overturn FCC moves to loosen controls on media ownership. "What Americans see, hear and read is increasingly controlled by a few people. That is not in the public interest," declared Senator Byron Dorgan, sponsor of the measure that the White House, Senate leaders and the broadcast conglomerates sought to derail. Before the vote, Dorgan accepted petitions from 342,000 Americans calling on Congress to kill the FCC rules. "Broadcast stations operate on airwaves that are owned by the public.... The FCC seems to have forgotten that, but the American people have not forgotten," Dorgan said. Next step: Pressure House Speaker Dennis Hastert to let his chamber follow the Senate's lead.

POISON IVY

■ Kim Phillips-Fein writes: On September 13, approximately 10,000 workers and students gathered on a rainy New Haven afternoon in support of a two-and-a-half-week strike by Yale University's clerical, maintenance and dining hall employees. Surrounded by crowds chanting "Shame on Yale!," some 150 protesters were arrested for blocking traffic—among them several labor leaders, including AFL-CIO president John Sweeney, as well as the presidents of UNITE! (the garment workers' union), the Carpenters' union, the Service Employees International Union and the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees (the parent union of the Yale locals). Those engaging in the mass civil disobedience also included college students, at least one Yale professor and many middle-aged and elderly members and supporters of the unions [see www.thenation.com].

JOHNNY CASH, MAN IN BLACK

■ "I wear the black for the poor and the beaten down, livin' in the hopeless, hungry side of town," sang country star Johnny Cash, explaining his dark taste in clothes. Recorded in 1971 as the Vietnam War raged, "Man in Black" featured the line, "I wear the black in mournin' for the lives that could have been. Each week we lose a hundred fine young men." Cash's death at 71 was marked by appropriate recognition of the man's artistry, but Kris Kristofferson got it right when he said his friend was beloved at least as much "for his championing of the common man."

RUMSFELD MUST GO

■ "The Defense Secretary should resign—now," we wrote back in April, and we believe it even more strongly now. That's why we support the Move On/Win Without War "Change the Team" campaign. As we noted in our bill of indictment, Rumsfeld, together with his deputy Paul Wolfowitz, his adviser Richard Perle and Vice President Cheney, were the principal architects of the Administration's Iraq venture "in pursuit of which they have deceived the American people, misled US soldiers whose lives are at risk, scorned the United Nations and defied international law."

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COMMENT

Lieberman expressed concern that Dean was breaking with "a half a century of American foreign policy." Massachusetts Senator John Kerry questioned the former Vermont governor's capacity to manage US foreign policy. And House minority leader Nancy Pelosi of California signed a letter with thirty-three Congressional Democrats that said, "It is unacceptable for the U.S. to be 'even-handed' on these fundamental issues."

Dean responded by saying his stance was "exactly the same as Bill Clinton's," and that "the position that I take on Israel is exactly the position the United States has taken for fifty-four years." That's in line with a campaign in which Dean has gone so far as to say his commitment to Israel is "visceral." His fundraising chair is Steven Grossman, former head of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, a group aligned with Israeli hawks. Asked in 2002 whether he favored the AIPAC line or that of the more dovish Americans for Peace Now, Dean said, "My view is closer to AIPAC's view." Indeed, Dean's Middle East positions have consistently been closer to Lieberman's than to those of Representative Dennis Kucinich—so much so that a widely circulated Internet article was titled "Dean Not Progressive on Mideast."

Unlike Jesse Jackson in 1988, Dean proposes no great shift in US policy on Israel. The attacks from Lieberman and Kerry are rank political posturing. More troubling is the condemnation by Pelosi and other party leaders of even a hint of "evenhandedness." That smacks of the old game of positioning Democrats to the right of the Republicans on Middle East policy—in a perceived contest for Jewish-American votes and contributions. The problem with this approach, as Middle East scholar Stephen Zunes points out, is that "this suggests you cannot be firmly committed to Israel and question [Israel's hawkish Prime Minister] Ariel Sharon's policies. If that's where Democrats put themselves, they don't leave room to debate Bush on the issue." They'll also have a tougher time appealing to American voters—73 percent of whom, according to a recent University of Maryland poll, prefer that the United States not take sides.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK: "How about a ticket of John Kerry and Wesley Clark: Two Vietnam veterans against two chickenhawks," muses author Anne Lamott. JOHN NICHOLS

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CALVIN TRILLIN

THE ARNIE JUGGERNAUT ENCOUNTERS A COMMITTED FEMINIST

It may not do much good to beg her
To cast her vote for Schwarzenegger:
His flicks, the tales make pollsters rate her
A hater of the Terminator.

the **nature** of change

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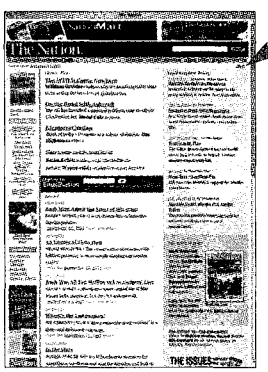

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JONATHAN SCHELL

Learning the Obvious

Sometimes when I feel I want to raise my voice against the American folly in Iraq, my zeal is infected with boredom. I get the urge to say that the war in Iraq is worsening the nuclear proliferation problem (Iran and North Korea are speeding up their nuclear programs in part in order to avoid regime change); that there is no proven alliance between Saddam Hussein and Al Qaeda; that we are inflaming the peoples of the Middle East against us; that we are driving away even our traditional European allies by our highhanded policies; that we are making ourselves less secure, not more. But then I realize that these things are by now obvious, and to state what is obvious is boring. I want to say them not because they are fresh and interesting but because they are not heeded. But if to state the obvious is boring, then to repeat it is the very definition of boredom. The point was impressed on me when I read a quotation in the indispensable website Tomdispatch (www.tomdispatch.org) from President George H.W. Bush's memoir, *A World Transformed*, which was written with Brent Scowcroft. Bush was talking about why he did not overthrow Saddam Hussein at the end of the first Gulf War:

> Trying to eliminate Saddam...would have incurred incalculable human and political costs. Apprehending him was probably impossible.... We would have been forced to occupy Baghdad and, in effect, rule Iraq.... there was no viable "exit strategy" we could see, violating another of our principles. Furthermore, we had been self-consciously trying to set a pattern for handling aggression in the post–Cold War world. Going in and occupying Iraq, thus unilaterally exceeding the United Nations' mandate, would have destroyed the precedent of international response to aggression that we hoped to establish. Had we gone the invasion route, the United States could conceivably still be an occupying power in a bitterly hostile land.

I couldn't have said it better myself. And this was written five years ago, by the father of the current President. So much for feeling brilliant for insisting upon such things now.

I'm reminded of my experience as one of those who opposed the war in Vietnam. In the mid-to-late 1960s, we tirelessly pointed out that the war was mainly a nationalist rebellion against foreign occupation, not mainly an advance probe of world Communism; that the issue could only be solved politically, not militarily; that the war was weakening, not strengthening, the United States; that the only solution was to withdraw America troops—and so on and so forth. We considered ourselves brave for saying such things, all of which were rejected by mainstream opinion. And yet at that time, too, the antiwar arguments were obvious, or soon became so. Just how obvious is revealed by Kai Bird's excellent biography of William and McGeorge Bundy, *The Color of Truth*. Bird reveals that as assistant secretary of state, William Bundy—widely seen as a Vietnam hawk—confessed in a 1964 paper that "a bad colonial heritage of long standing, totally inadequate preparation for self-government by the colonial power, a colonialist war fought in half-baked fashion and lost, a nationalist movement taken over by Communism ruling in the other half of an ethnically and historically united country, the Communist side inheriting much the better military force and far more than its share of the talent—these are the facts that dog us today." Bird says that in this sentence Bundy prefigured "just about all the points that I.F. Stone, Bernard Fall or other early critics of the war would make within a year."

Even more striking is a conversation in 1964 between President Lyndon Johnson and Richard Russell, chairman of the Senate Armed Services committee. "I don't believe the American people ever want me to [abandon Vietnam]," Johnson told Russell. "If I lose it, I think they'll say I've lost it.... At the same time, I don't want to commit us to a war." Russell's answer was a prophecy that turned out to be exact. A full-scale effort would "take a half million men." he said. "They'd be bogged down in there ten years." In short, all the arguments against the war were privately well-known—obvious—to the Administration. Yet it plunged deeper and deeper into the war.

Why? There appear to be two closely related answers. One is political. As Johnson's comment hints, ever since the United States had "lost" China to Communism in 1949, it was considered politically fatal to "lose" another country. As McGeorge Bundy wrote to Johnson, "The political damage to Truman and Acheson from the fall of China arose because most Americans came to believe that we could and should have done more than we did to prevent it. This is exactly what would happen now if we should seem to be the first to quit in Saigon." The second answer was strategic. Policy-makers of the day believed that nothing in the foreign policy of the United States was more important than American "credibility." If American power was defeated anywhere, they believed, it might crumble everywhere. The idea of a strategic retreat was ruled out. Both motives, then, had to do with power—in the first place, domestic political power, in the second, global power.

Today, too, the obvious is trumped by the argument of power. The need therefore is not just to produce more facts and better arguments (though those are always needed) but to challenge the powers that uphold illusion. The best antidote is the counterforce of public opinion, which means, in the last analysis, the force of voting. Today, as in Vietnam thirty years ago, it is possible to win this battle. In the Vietnam years, public opinion gradually changed. It drove a President—Lyndon Johnson—out of office. It forced another, Richard Nixon, to end the war, and then he was driven out of office, too. Today, public opinion is already shifting. A recent ABC-*Washington Post* poll records that 60 percent of the public opposes George W. Bush's request to Congress for $87 billion for the war. The antiwar candidate Howard Dean has become the acknowledged front-runner for the Democratic nomination. In some polls, Bush's overall approval ratings are in negative territory. This is the kind of argument that Presidents understand.

The question is, How many more people, American and Iraqi, will have to lose their lives to teach our leaders the obvious?

Jonathan Schell, the Harold Willens Peace Fellow of the Nation Institute, is the author of the recently published The Unconquerable World: Power, Nonviolence, and the Will of the People *(Metropolitan).*

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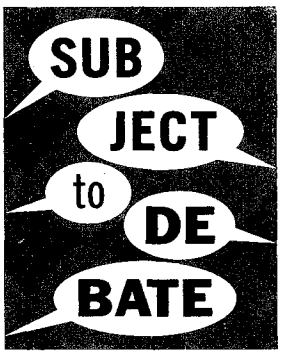
KATHA POLLITT

Governor Groper?



What was the lowest point in Arnold Schwarzenegger and Maria Shriver's appearance on *Oprah*? Was it when the three of them chortled and beamed about how exciting it was for Arnold to learn about "all those issues" he'll have to deal with as governor ("Like are they at your house to—teaching you stuff every night?" Ms. Winfrey asked)—and the audience applauded? Or was it when Schwarzenegger compared his refusal to participate in more than one debate to the way he had skipped over the Mr. Venice Beach contest and gone straight for the Mr. Olympia title—and the audience applauded? Hurray for the candidate with no experience, no information and no knowledge! Bravo for the candidate who won't stoop to defending his platform—or even explain what it is!

The purpose of this hourlong infomercial—but why, Oprah, why?—was to give Schwarzenegger a chance to debunk his image as a male chauvinist boor with Oprah's huge, mostly female audience, and who knows, maybe it worked. First there was Maria, glamorous, lean as a whippet, her diamond cross sparkling against her black long-sleeved sweater, enthusiastically proclaiming how much she loved him, how ardently he supported her career (he was "one of the most gracious, supportive women—I mean man—man I've ever met") and how peeved she was by suggestions that as a Kennedy female she had been "bred to look the other way" while her husband pawed, cavorted and harassed his way through life. Those stories were all lies. Then Arnold bounded out looking tanned and relaxed, and the three sat around like the old showbiz troupers and friends they are and laughed about the cup of coffee Arnold makes Maria every morning, and the children, who do their own laundry and are being brought up to be, says Maria, "kind, polite, you know, grateful" (grateful? *Achtung!*), and the crazy things people did back in the 1970s, when Arnold told *Oui* magazine that he took part in a gangbang of a "black girl" at Gold's Gym. Except maybe he didn't: "The idea was always to say things, as I said, over the top so you get the headlines because bodybuilding, like I said, had no reputation yet." He was just pretending to be a macho jerk for the good of the sport. See?

As of this writing the California recall has been postponed, which is supposed to hurt Schwarzenegger, because it allows people more time to find out how conservative and obnoxious and ignorant he is. (I know, I know, I say that like it's a bad thing.) But it also allows him more time to win over women, who favor his Democratic rival Cruz Bustamante. The media seem determined to defuse the sexism issue. On CNN, Howie Kurtz pooh-poohed the *Oui* interview as "celebrity gossip," and his guest William Bastone of TheSmokingGun.com barely demurred, even though Bastone broke the story. The day after the *Oprah* appearance, the *Los Angeles Times* ran a front-page article pointing out how often in his career Schwarzenegger has noted that a woman is "smart" or mentioned brains as a good thing for a woman to have. As he says in the July *Esquire*, "When you see a blonde with great tits and a great ass, you say to yourself, hey, she must be stupid or must have nothing else to offer.... But then again there is the one that is as smart as her breasts look, great as her face looks, beautiful as her whole body looks gorgeous, you know, so people are shocked."

Now just imagine for a moment that a Democratic politician had told a soft-core men's magazine in 1977 about gangbanging a "black girl"—and when asked about it in 2003 said he didn't remember a thing about the interview or the incident itself, but also said he made the whole thing up to get attention. Would that story have been relegated to the bin of youthful escapades by Fox, CNN, the *New York Post*, Peggy Noonan, Ann Coulter, Bill O'Reilly and the rest? Or would we be hearing a lot about "character" and the "I was lying" defense? Suppose that same Democrat told *Playboy* in 1988 he didn't allow his wife or mother (?!) to wear pants in public. And suppose that in 2000, two British television journalists accused that Democrat, now 53, well past the youthful-escapade phase, of groping them, and publicly declared themselves disgusted and offended? Let's say that he told *Entertainment Weekly* this past July how fun it was to push Kristanna Loken's head into a toilet in *Terminator 3* ("I wanted to have something floating in there"). Let's say papers in Britain were reporting all this and more—from feeling up women in the presence of his wife to heavy use of illegal steroids to rumors of an extramarital affair with a 16-year-old actress—wouldn't we be hearing about it night and day?

And if that Democrat was a woman? Forget it! A rich, egocentric, freaky Hollywood diva whose naked photos were plastered all over cyberspace, who waves away questions about her program ("details, details!") would have no credibility in the first place. Angelina Jolie for governor of the fifth-largest economy in the world? Are you out of your mind? But even if she were a Rhodes scholar, a four-star general and a churchgoing mother of six, that woman would be finished the minute the media turned up so much as the femur or tibia of a sexual skeleton among the power suits in her closet. Wherever that "black girl" is today, you can bet it's not politics. What's good for the groper is not good for the groupie.

The explanation for the political and gender double standard can't be something as simple as the media being mostly owned by conservatives and mostly written, edited, produced and spoken by men—can it? (Fun fact: There are actually fewer female newspaper executives or top editors today than five years ago.) After all, there is Oprah—the queen of go-girl empowerment, the anti–Howard Stern, the woman who brought Toni Morrison to the masses—and Oprah thinks Arnold Schwarzenegger is a prince among men. Celebrity is thicker than sisterhood. Now that she has jumped into the California recall, the *New York Times* rightly called on Oprah to invite all the major candidates onto her show. The people who really need a platform, though, are the women like the activists of Code Pink who follow Schwarzenegger around with their ARNOLD, YOU'RE TERMINATED banner—the women who think humiliating, insulting and harassing women is something worth talking about. ■

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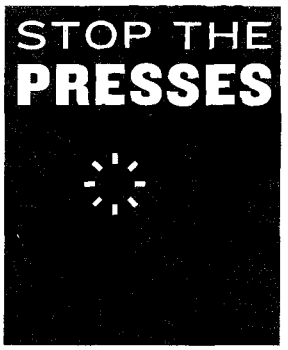
ERIC ALTERMAN

9/11/01: Where Was George?



September 11 is often said to be the defining moment in the Bush presidency, even of modern history. How strange, therefore, that Bush's behavior that morning—along with that of his Administration—is almost never examined in any detail. This is all the more incredible when one considers the fact that 9/11 is among the most exhaustively chronicled days in human history and Bush among its most heavily covered individuals. No less odd has been the media's willingness to let the many inconsistencies in White House stories pass unexamined. They seem content instead to let Showtime tell the story, Leni Riefenstahl–style.

That fateful morning, Bush was visiting the Emma E. Booker Elementary School in Sarasota. The moment he learned of the attacks is a matter of deep dispute. CIA chief George Tenet was informed of the first crash almost immediately and is reported to have remarked to his breakfast companion, former Senator David Boren, "You know, this has bin Laden's fingerprints all over it." But the President's aides maintain that he was not told about the attack for more than fifteen minutes, well after viewers saw the first building engulfed in smoke on CNN, and even after he interrupted his schedule to take a call from Condoleezza Rice upon leaving his limousine, after the first crash took place.

The various accounts offered by the White House are almost all inconsistent with one another. On December 4, 2001, Bush was asked, "How did you feel when you heard about the terrorist attack?" Bush replied, "I was sitting outside the classroom waiting to go in, and I saw an airplane hit the tower—the TV was obviously on. And I used to fly myself, and I said, well, there's one terrible pilot. I said, it must have been a horrible accident. But I was whisked off there. I didn't have much time to think about it." Bush repeated the same story on January 5, 2002, stating, "First of all, when we walked into the classroom, I had seen this plane fly into the first building. There was a TV set on. And you know, I thought it was pilot error, and I was amazed that anybody could make such a terrible mistake...."

This is false. Nobody saw the jetliner crash into the first tower on television until a videotape surfaced a day later. What's more, Bush's memory not only contradicts every media report of that morning, it also contradicts what he said on the day of the attack. In his speech to the nation that evening, Bush said, "Immediately following the first attack, I implemented our government's emergency response plans." Again, this statement has never been satisfactorily explained. No one besides Bush has ever spoken of these "emergency plans," and the mere idea of their implementation is contradicted by Bush's claim that at the time, he believed the crash to have been a case of pilot error.

Other contradictions abound. Bush told an interviewer that Chief of Staff Andrew Card had been the first person to let him know of the crash. Card was saying, Bush explained, " 'Here's what you're going to be doing: You're going to meet so-and-so, such-and-such.' Then Andy Card said, 'By the way, an aircraft flew into the World Trade Center.' " Ari Fleischer repeated this story, claiming that Card had told Bush about the crash "as the President finished shaking hands in a hallway of school officials." But other sources, including Bob Woodward's allegedly authoritative account, have Karl Rove telling Bush the news.

What we do know is that Bush continued to read to the children and pose for the cameras long after the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD), the National Military Command Center, the Pentagon, the White House, the Secret Service and Canada's Strategic Command were all aware that three jetliners had been hijacked. The President's entourage hung around a full fifty minutes after CNN broadcast the news of the first crash. Half an hour after the first plane hit, Bush told the children, "Hoo! These are great readers. Very impressive! Thank you all so very much for showing me your reading skills. I bet they practice, too. Don't you? Reading more than they watch TV? Anybody do that? Read more than you watch TV? [Hands go up] Oh that's great! Very good. Very important to practice! Thanks for having me. I'm very impressed."

White House staff members claimed that Bush remained with the children so as not to "upset" or "alarm" them. This is a truly bewildering excuse. If the country was under attack, Bush might be forgiven for upsetting a few schoolkids. If the President's life was in danger, then so was the life of every little child in that room. At the time, fighter jets had been dispatched to defend New York City. But according to one of the fighter pilots, it would have done no good to catch up to one of the hijacked planes before it landed in a murderous explosion at the next population center. The only person with the authority to order the plane to be shot down, noted the pilot, was the President, who was still reading to schoolchildren.

The panic motif runs through the rest of the President's actions that day. While the presidential motorcade did finally head for the airport, Bush is alleged to have spoken on the phone to Cheney and ordered all flights nationwide grounded. Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta has also tried to take credit for the order, but according to *Slate*, this too is false, though "FAA officials had begged [the reporter] to maintain the fiction." In fact, according to *USA Today*, it was FAA administrator Ben Sliney who issued the order. Amazingly, Air Force One took off with no military protection. It remained unprotected in the sky for more than an hour, though Florida is filled with Air Force bases just minutes away with planes that are supposed to be on twenty-four-hour alert.

Bush's aides later offered, and retracted, the excuse that he spent the day flying around the country because of threats to Air Force One believed to have been received at the White House. What nobody has ever explained is this: If you think Air Force One is to be attacked, why go up in Air Force One?

I don't have the answers to these questions. But why is no one asking them? ■

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ARTICLES

Stretched Thin, Lied to & Mistreated

CHRISTIAN PARENTI

An M-16 rifle hangs by a cramped military cot. On the wall above is a message in thick black ink: "Ali Baba, you owe me a strawberry milk!"

It's a private joke but could just as easily summarize the worldview of American soldiers here in Baghdad, the fetid basement of Donald Rumsfeld's house of victory. Trapped in the polluted heat, poorly supplied and cut off from regular news, the GIs are fighting a guerrilla war that they neither wanted, expected nor trained for. On the urban battlefields of central Iraq, "shock and awe" and all the other "new way of war" buzzwords are drowned out by the din of diesel-powered generators, Islamic prayer calls and the occasional pop of small-arms fire.

Here, the high-tech weaponry that so emboldens Pentagon bureaucrats is largely useless, and the grinding work of counter-insurgency is done the old-fashioned way—by hand. Not surprisingly, most of the American GIs stuck with the job are weary, frustrated and ready to go home.

It is noon and the mercury is hanging steady at 115 Fahrenheit. The filmmaker Garrett Scott and I are "embedded" with Alpha Company of the Third Battalion of the 124th Infantry, a Florida National Guard unit about half of whom did time in the regular Army, often with elite groups like the Rangers. Like most frontline troops in Iraq, the majority are white but there is a sizable minority of African-American and Latino soldiers among them. Unlike most combat units, about 65 percent are college students—they've traded six years with the Guard for tuition at Florida State. Typically, that means occasional weekends in the Everglades or directing traffic during hurricanes. Instead, these guys got sent to Iraq, and as yet they have no sure departure date.

Mobilized in December, they crossed over from Kuwait on day one of the invasion and are now bivouacked in the looted remains of a Republican Guard officers' club, a modernist slab of polished marble and tinted glass that the GIs have fortified with plywood, sandbags and razor wire.

Behind "the club" is a three-story dormitory, a warren of small one-bedroom apartments, each holding a nine-man squad of soldiers and all their gear. Around 200 guys are packed in here. Their sweaty fatigues drape the banisters of the exterior stairway, while inside the cramped, dark rooms the floors are covered with cots, heaps of flak vests, guns and, where possible, big tin, water-based air-conditioners called swamp coolers. Surrounding the base is a chaotic working-class neighborhood of two- and three-story cement homes and apartment buildings. Not far away is the muddy Tigris River.

This company limits patrols to three or four hours a day. For the many hours in between, the guys pull guard duty, hang out in their cavelike rooms or work out in a makeshift weight room.

"We're getting just a little bit stir-crazy," explains the lanky Sergeant Sellers. His demeanor is typical of the nine-man squad we have been assigned to, friendly but serious, with a wry and angry sense of humor. On the side of his helmet Sellers has, in violation of regs, attached the unmistakable pin and ring of a hand grenade. Next to it is written, "Pull Here."

Leaning back on a cot, he's drawing a large, intricate pattern on a female mannequin leg. The wall above him displays a photo collage of pictures retrieved from a looted Iraqi women's college. Smiling young ladies wearing the *hijab* sip sodas and stroll past buses. They seem to be on some sort of field trip. Nearby are photos clipped from *Maxim*, of coy young American girls offering up their pert round bottoms. Dominating it all is a large hand-drawn dragon and a photo of Jessica Lynch with a bubble caption

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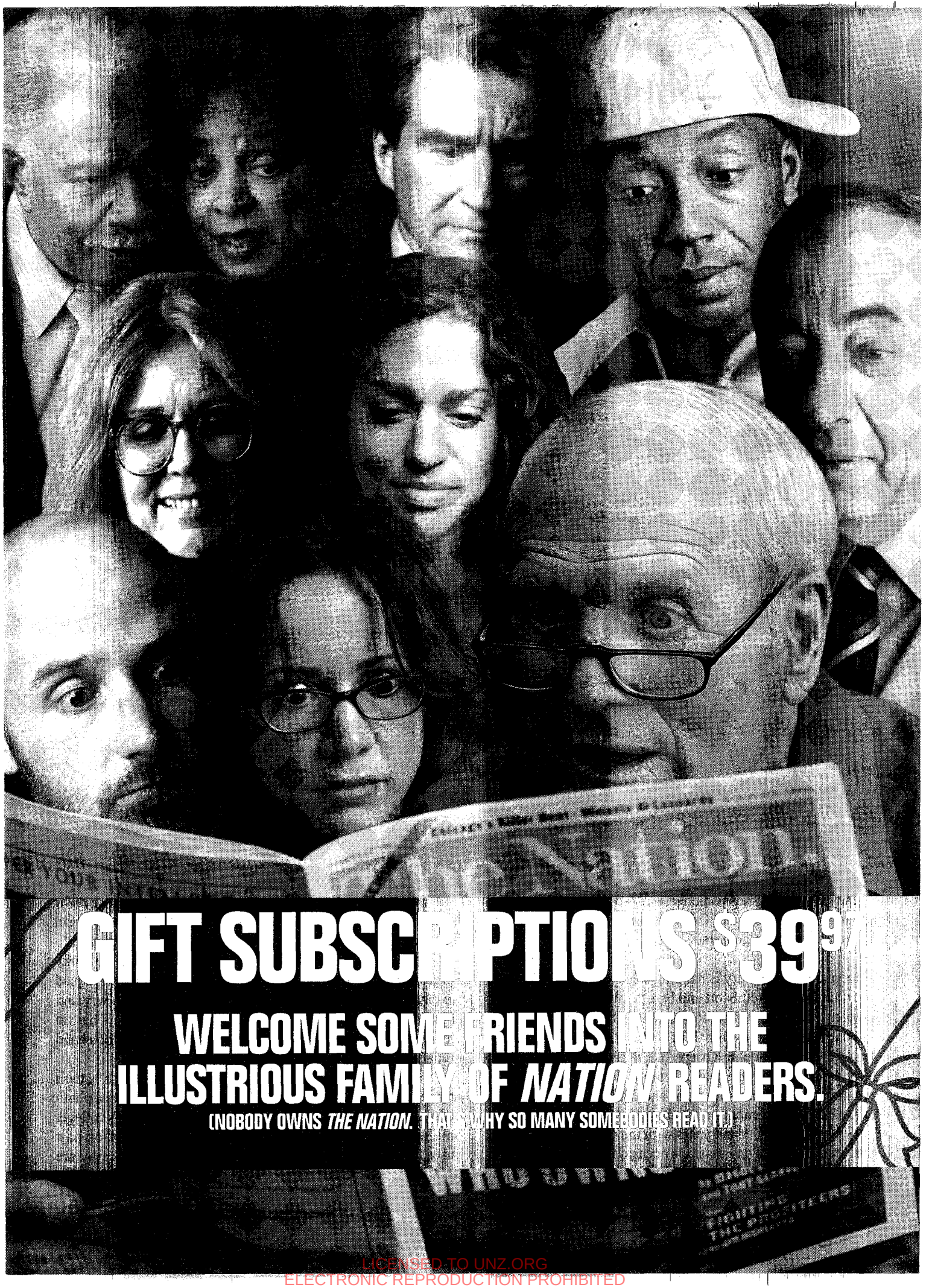
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reading: "Hi, I am a war hero. And I think that weapons maintenance is totally unimportant."

The boys don't like Lynch and find the story of her rescue ridiculous. They'd been down the same road a day earlier and are unsympathetic. "We just feel that it's unfair and kind of distorted the way the whole Jessica, quote, 'rescue' thing got hyped," explains Staff Sgt. Kreed Howell. He is in charge of the squad, and at 31 a bit older than most of his men. Muscular and clean-cut, Howell is a relaxed and natural leader, with the gracious bearing of a proper Southern upbringing.

"In other words, you'd have to be really fucking dumb to get lost on the road," says another, less diplomatic soldier.

Specialist John Crawford sits in a tiny, windowless supply closet that is loaded with packs and gear. He is two credits short of a BA in anthropology and wants to go to graduate school. Howell, a Republican, amicably describes Crawford as the squad's house liberal.

There's just enough extra room in the closet for Crawford, a chair and a little shelf on which sits a laptop. Hanging by this makeshift desk is a handwritten sign from "the management" requesting that soldiers masturbating in the supply closet "remove their donations in a receptacle." Instead of watching pornography DVDs, Crawford is here to finish a short story. "Trying to start writing again," he says.

Crawford is a fan of Tim O'Brien, particularly *The Things They Carried*. We chat, then he shows me his short story. It's about a vet who is back home in north Florida trying to deal with the memory of having accidentally blown away a child while serving in Iraq.

Later in the cramped main room, Sellers and Sergeant Brunelle, another one of the squad's more gregarious and dominant personalities, are matter-of-factly showing us digital photos of dead Iraqis.

"These guys shot at some of our guys, so we lit 'em up. Put two .50-cal rounds in their vehicle. One went through this dude's hip and into the other guy's head," explains Brunelle. The third man in the car lived. "His buddy was crying like a baby. Just sitting there bawling with his friend's brains and skull fragments all over his face. One of our guys came up to him and is like: 'Hey! No crying in baseball!'"

"I know that probably sounds sick," says Sellers, "but humor is the only way you can deal with this shit."

And just below the humor is volcanic rage. These guys are proud to be soldiers and don't want to come across as whiners, but they are furious about what they've been through. They hate having their lives disrupted and put at risk. They hate the military for its stupidity, its feckless lieutenants and blowhard brass living comfortably in Saddam's palaces. They hate Iraqis—or, as they say, "hajis"—for trying to kill them. They hate the country for its dust, heat and sewage-clogged streets. They hate having killed people. Some even hate the politics of the war. And because most of them are, ultimately, just regular well-intentioned guys, one senses the distinct fear that someday a few may hate themselves for what they have been forced to do here.

Added to such injury is insult: The military treats these soldiers like unwanted stepchildren. This unit's rifles are retooled hand-me-downs from Vietnam. They have inadequate radio gear, so they buy their own unencrypted Motorola walkie-talkies. The same goes for flashlights, knives and some components for night-vision sights. The low-performance Iraqi air-conditioners and fans, as well as the one satellite phone and payment cards shared by the whole company for calling home, were also purchased out of pocket from civilian suppliers.

Bottled water rations are kept to two liters a day. After that the guys drink from "water buffaloes"—big, hot chlorination tanks that turn the amoeba-infested dreck from the local taps into something like swimming-pool water. Mix this with powdered Gatorade and you can wash down a famously bad MRE (Meal Ready to Eat).

To top it all off they must endure the pathologically uptight culture of the Army hierarchy. The Third of the 124th is now attached to the newly arrived First Armored Division, and when it is time to raid suspected resistance cells it's the Guardsmen who have to kick in the doors and clear the apartments.

The military treats these soldiers like unwanted stepchildren. The unit's rifles are retooled hand-me-downs from Vietnam.

"The First AD wants us to catch bullets for them but won't give us enough water, doesn't let us wear do-rags and makes us roll down our shirt sleeves so we look proper! Can you believe that shit?" Sergeant Sellers is pissed off.

The soldiers' improvisation extends to food as well. After a month or so of occupying "the club," the company commander, Captain Sanchez, allowed two Iraqi entrepreneurs to open shop on his side of the wire—one runs a slow Internet cafe, the other a kebab stand where the "Joes" pay US dollars for grilled lamb on flat bread.

"The haji stand is one of the only things we have to look forward to, but the First AD keeps getting scared and shutting it down." Sellers is on a roll, but he's not alone.

Even the lighthearted Howell, who insists that the squad has it better than most troops, chimes in. "The one thing I will say is that we have been here entirely too long. If I am not home by Christmas my business will fail." Back "on earth" (in Panama City, Florida), Howell is a building contractor, with a wife, two small children, equipment, debts and employees.

Perhaps the most shocking bit of military incompetence is the unit's lack of formal training in what's called "close-quarter combat." The urbanized mayhem of Mogadishu may loom large in the discourse of the military's academic journals like *Parameters* and the *Naval War College Review*, but many US infantrymen are trained only in large-scale, open-country maneuvers—how to defend Germany from a wave of Russian tanks.

So, since "the end of the war" these guys have had to retrain themselves in the dark arts of urban combat. "The houses here are small, too," says Brunelle. "Once you're inside you can barely get your rifle up. You got women scream-

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Christian Parenti is the author of The Soft Cage: Surveillance in America From Slavery to the War on Terror *(Basic) and a fellow at City University of New York's Center for Place, Culture, and Politics.*

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ing, people, furniture everywhere. It's insane."

By now this company has conducted scores of raids, taken fire on the street, taken casualties, taken rocket-propelled grenade attacks to the club and are defiantly proud of the fact that they have essentially been abandoned, survived, retrained themselves and can keep a lid on their little piece of Baghdad. But it's not always the Joes who have the upper hand. Increasingly, Haji seems to sets the agenda.

A thick black plume of smoke rises from Karrada Street, a popular electronics district where US patrols often buy air-conditioners and DVDs. An American Humvee, making just such a stop, has been blown to pieces by a remote-activated "improvised explosive device," or IED, buried in the median between two lanes of traffic. By chance two colleagues and I are the first press on the scene. The street is empty of traffic and quiet except for the local shopkeepers, who occasionally call out to us in Arabic and English: "Be careful."

Finally we get close enough to see clearly. About twenty feet away is a military transport truck and a Humvee, and beyond that are the flaming remains of a third Humvee. A handful of American soldiers are crouched behind the truck, totally still. There's no firing, no yelling, no talking, no radio traffic. No one is screaming, but two GIs are down. As yet there are no reinforcements or helicopters overhead. All one can hear is the burning of the Humvee.

Out on patrol, Crawford mockingly introduces himself to no one in particular. 'John Crawford, I work in population reduction.'

Then it begins: The ammunition in the burning Humvee starts to explode and the troops in the street start firing. Armored personnel carriers arrive and disgorge dozens of soldiers from the 82nd Airborne to join the fight. The target is a three-story office building just across from the engulfed Humvee. Occasionally we hear a few rounds of return fire pass by like hot razors slashing straight lines through the air. The really close rounds just sound like loud cracks.

"That's Kalashnikov. I know the voice," says Ahmed, our friend and translator. There is a distinct note of national pride in his voice—his countrymen are fighting back—never mind the fact that we are now mixed in with the most forward US troops and getting shot at.

The firefight goes on for about two hours, moving slowly and methodically. It is in many ways an encapsulation of the whole war—confusing and labor-intensive. The GIs have more firepower than they can use, and they don't even know exactly where or who the enemy is. Civilians are hiding in every corner, the ground floor of the target building is full of merchants and shoppers, and undisciplined fire could mean scores of dead civilians.

There are two GIs on the ground, one with his legs gone and probably set to die. When a medevac helicopter arrives just overhead, it, too, like much other technology, is foiled. The street is crisscrossed with electrical wires and there is no way the chopper can land to extract the wounded. The soldiers around us look grave and tired.

Eventually some Bradley fighting vehicles start pounding the building with mean 250-millimeter cannon shells. Whoever might have been shooting from upstairs is either dead or gone.

The street is now littered with overturned air-conditioners, fans and refrigerators. A cooler of sodas sits forlorn on the sidewalk. Farther away two civilians lie dead, caught in the crossfire. A soldier peeks out from the hatch of a Bradley and calls over to a journalist, "Hey, can you grab me one of those Cokes?"

After the shootout we promised ourselves we'd stay out of Humvees and away from US soldiers. But that was yesterday. Now Crawford is helping us put on body armor and soon we'll be on patrol. As we move out with the nine soldiers the mood is somewhere between tense and bored. Crawford mockingly introduces himself to no one in particular: "John Crawford, I work in population reduction."

"Watch the garbage—if you see wires coming out of a pile it's an IED," warns Howell. The patrol is uneventful. We walk fast through back streets and rubbish-strewn lots, pouring sweat in the late afternoon heat. Local residents watch the small squad with a mixture of civility, indifference and open hostility. An Iraqi man shouts, "When? When? When? Go!" The soldiers ignore him.

"Sometimes we sham," explains one of the guys. "We'll just go out and kick it behind some wall. Watch what's going on but skip the walking. And sometimes at night we get sneaky-deaky. Creep up on Haji, so he knows we're all around."

"I am just walking to be walking," says the laconic Fredrick Pearson, *a k a* "Diddy," the only African-American in Howell's squad. Back home he works in the State Supreme Court bureaucracy and plans to go to law school. "I just keep an eye on the rooftops, look around and walk."

The patrols aren't always peaceful. One soldier mentions that he recently "kicked the shit out of a 12-year-old kid" who menaced him with a toy gun.

Later we roll with the squad on another patrol, this time at night and in two Humvees. Now there's more evident hostility from the young Iraqi men loitering in the dark. Most of these infantry soldiers don't like being stuck in vehicles. At a blacked-out corner where a particularly large group of youths are clustered, the Humvees stop and Howell bails out into the crowd. There is no interpreter along tonight.

"Hey, guys! What's up? How y'all doing? OK? Everything OK? All right?" asks Howell in his jaunty, laid-back north Florida accent. The sullen young men fade away into the dark, except for two, who shake the sergeant's hand. Howell's attempt to take the high road, winning hearts and minds, doesn't seem to be for show. He really believes in this war. But in the torrid gloom of the Baghdad night, his efforts seem tragically doomed.

Watching Howell I think about the civilian technocrats working with Paul Bremer at the Coalition Provisional Authority; the electricity is out half the time, and these folks hold meetings on how best to privatize state industries and end food rations. Meanwhile, the city seethes. The Pentagon, likewise, seems to have no clear plan; its troops are stretched thin, lied to and mistreated. The whole charade feels increasingly patched together, poorly improvised. Ultimately, there's very little that Howell and his squad can do about any of this. After all, it's not their war. They just work here. ■

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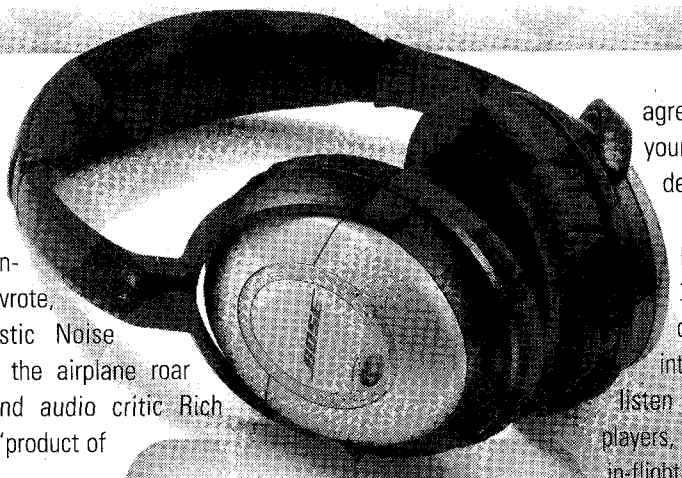

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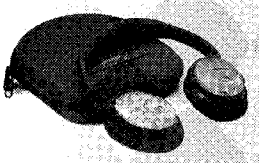

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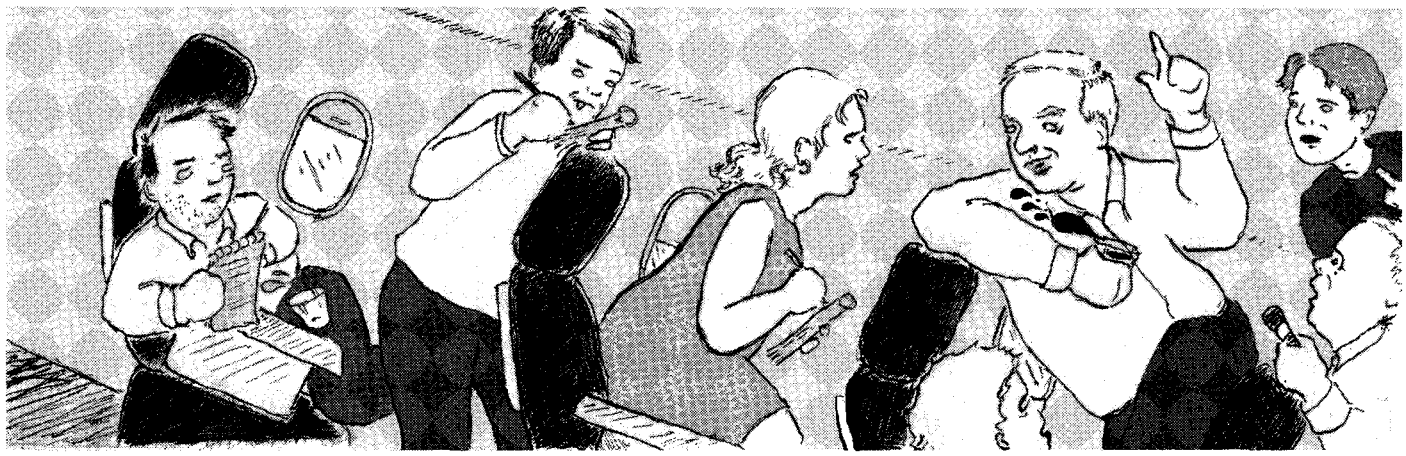
FROM THE PLASTIC GRASS ON THE 'GRASSROOTS EXPRESS' TO THE MULTICULTI PAGEANTS AT ALMOST EVERY STOP, IT WAS POLITICS AS USUAL ON THE SLEEPLESS SUMMER TOUR.



EMILY FLAKE

Dean-a-Palooza: A Front-Runner Takes to the Skies

MATT TAIBBI

It is the second day of Howard Dean's nine-city "Sleepless Summer Tour," and I'm standing on the tarmac at the airport in Portland, Oregon. I'm at the back of a long line of reporters to get onto the Dean campaign plane, nauseatingly dubbed the "Grassroots Express" by the candidate's staff. Waiting for me in my seat in the plane is a tuft of plastic grass; Dean's two bubbly communications aides, Patricia Enright and Courtney O'Donnell, thusly decorated the press section before the start of the trip.

It has been a long day already. The Dean rally at Portland State University earlier that afternoon drew about 5,000 people, an enormous number for a presidential campaign at this stage. Everywhere Howard Dean goes these days, he draws huge crowds. In Milwaukee the night before, nearly 1,000 people showed up at an airplane hangar late at night *during a Packers game* just to hear the candidate give a fifteen-minute speech. One local reporter in the crowd commented that Jesus Christ probably would have drawn 850. Everywhere you go, the buzz is unmistakable: Dean is the new liberal Elvis.

But right now, I'm not thinking about Elvis. I'm thinking about Crazy Eddie. That's because Dean at this very moment is standing apart from the crowd of reporters in front of the nose of the plane, doing what appeared to be his best impersonation of the famously manic New York home-electronics salesman. He's posing in front of campaign photographer John Pettitt, making a series of grotesque contortions—pointing variously at the camera and off to the side, making a rapid-fire series of painful-looking grins, puffing out his chest, giving an energetic dual thumbs-up.

"Check that out," I say to the other reporters in line. "I don't want to sell anything—I'm just CRAZZEEE!"

Blank stares; no response. The other reporters must not be from New York—or else they just don't think I'm funny. Only Sandeep Kaushik of the Seattle paper *The Stranger* smiles. We decide to go over and see what the governor is doing.

It turned out that Dean was having photos taken for the cover of a book he has coming out soon. Pettitt later told me that campaign finance rules prohibited Dean from having the picture taken at an actual campaign event like the Portland rally. "That would be a use of campaign money for a private venture," Pettitt explained. "We had to do it after one of the events."

Which made sense—but the sight of the governor up close in mid-pose is an image I won't likely forget soon. Without any prompting from Pettitt, he was feverishly muttering snippets from his stump speech in the middle of the frantic gesturing. "We're going to have some fun at the President's expense today…heh heh… We're going to take America back…"

Pettitt snapped away. The governor looked deranged. It didn't seem to bother him that Sandeep and I were standing there, taking notes. By the time we got back to the line, most of the reporters were on the plane.

It is probably already possible to speak of the existence of a "Howard Dean problem" in liberal America. The outlines of the problem are as follows: Vast numbers of people, horrified by George Bush and desperate for a positive change, have geared up this election season to throw their weight behind anything resembling a human being. Along comes Howard Dean, a well-spoken, obviously intelligent man who opposes the war in Iraq before it is politically expedient to do so, bluntly calls George Bush by all the names he deserves and quickly builds an impressive insurgent candidacy largely on his own, through the strength of a remarkable Internet version of a word-of-mouth

Matt Taibbi is a columnist for New York Press.

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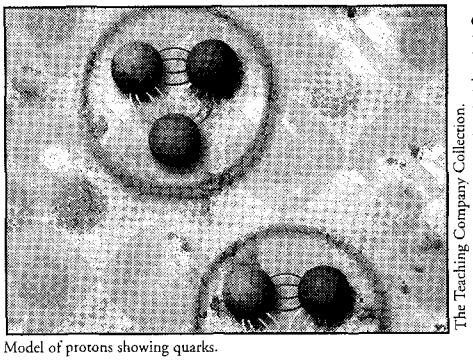

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campaign. To many, the choice seems obvious.

But thirsty people can have faulty vision, and when your eyes have burned you enough times, you begin to fear the mirage more than the thirst. And therein, for Howard Dean, lies the problem.

In the past six months the very success of Dean's campaign has become, for some, an indictment against him. Anything this popular has to be phony. Iconoclasts of all stripes have lined up to attack him, including voices of the left like Alexander Cockburn and Norman Solomon. On the liberal side critics have pointed to his refusal to support cuts in military spending, some seeming inconsistencies in his campaign finance positions, his support of the death penalty in some cases, his refusal to energetically disavow the corporate economy.

These criticisms have provoked a discussion over just how much may be overlooked in the effort to unseat George Bush. This debate—the Howard Dean problem—has gathered such redundant steam in recent months that one now sees on the Internet articles with such extraordinary titles as, "A Case Against the Case Against the Case for Howard Dean."

Six months ago, when I first started investigating the Democratic candidates for 2004, Dean seemed to me the only one whom I would trust not to steal my silverware. Now I'm not so sure—but that might not be Dean's fault. As I found out on the Sleepless Summer Tour, no candidate with "momentum" looks good up close; and the realities of modern campaigning make it hard to spot a mirage, even at close range.

Reporters were attracted by the big-campaign symbolism like moths to a lamp. To be full of shit in American politics means you're serious.

The first axiom of campaign journalism, one that should be memorized by any reporter who tries it, goes as follows: Substance is impossible.

Here's an example. After listening to Dean's stump speech a half-dozen times I decided to focus on some of his bread-and-butter themes, and make my central task in interviewing the candidate the turning over of just a few of the bigger stones in his public presentation. For instance: Dean, like every other candidate who has ever run for President in this country, presents himself in his speech as a strong supporter of small business. His twist on the subject is that while large corporations pay more, small businesses employ more people, and they don't (you have to imagine raucous applause and the doctor's fist pounding on the podium here) "take their jobs to China!"

Dean's idea for bringing about the growth of small businesses seemed to me suspiciously feeble and inadequate: He favors creating Sallie Mae–type government loans to help small businesses secure startup capital. But as a former owner of a small business (a newspaper in Buffalo), I knew that startup capital was not exactly the problem most small businesses face. The problem isn't buying the farm; the problem is keeping a Death Star like Cargill from blasting it into asteroid pieces. If you don't do something to rein in predatory corporations, any little loan program is nothing more than a cruel dog-and-pony show.

I wanted to ask Dean about this, but getting to him was problematic. Not that Dean didn't make himself accessible. He did: On every day of the trip, in fact sometimes twice or three times a day, Dean would make a kind of rugby plunge into the press section of the plane, opening himself up to questions. The geography of the 737 and the temperament of the reporters made this an extremely dicey task. At times the scrums turned comical. In one memorable exchange, Dean was forced to take a seat with us during turbulence and found himself sandwiched in a three-seat row between *Rolling Stone* reporter John Colapinto and *Modern Physician*'s Elizabeth Beckley. It was an extraordinary scene: a candidate for the exalted office of the presidency, staring directly at an in-the-upright-position tray table, trying to field utterly opposite questions from both sides of his head at the same time.

"Who are your top five bands?" Colapinto asked.

"Uh, well, there's Buffalo Springfield…" Dean began.

"How are you going to pay for your health insurance plan?" Beckley asked.

"Well…" Dean began.

"What about guitarists?" Colapinto asked. "Which guitarists do you like?"

"Well, there's Clapton…" Dean said.

This was the kind of atmosphere your question had to conquer on its way to the candidate's brain. I was no good at this dynamic for about the first thirty-six hours of the trip. But finally, on my third day, I managed to fight past *New York Times* reporter Jodi Wilgoren for a spot in Dean's face.

"Governor!" I said. "You talk in your speech about investing in small businesses, and creating Sallie Mae–type loans to help them out…"

"That's right," he said.

"But how do Sallie Mae loans help small businesses fight off the Cargills and the Wal-Marts of the world? Isn't the problem of small businesses rooted in their inability to compete economically with massive companies? Isn't this more of a fundamental problem in our economy that will take more than a few loan programs to fix?"

Dean paused, then nodded. "Well," he said, "there's not a whole lot the federal government can do about that."

What the hell kind of answer is that? I thought. I was about to press the matter, when suddenly *Miami Herald* reporter Peter Wallsten pushed me aside and lunged at the candidate.

"Governor, getting back to substance," he said. "Is it true that you paint your own house?"

I turned to Wallsten in shock. Getting back to substance? Fuck you! I thought.

Dean laughed. "Um, yes, it is," he said.

"Why do you paint your own house?" Wallsten asked.

Dean shrugged. "To save money, I suppose," he said. "I'm kind of a tightwad."

A dozen hands at once scrambled to write the word "tightwad."

"Do you paint the inside, or the outside?" said Wilgoren, jumping in.

"Um, both," Dean said.

"Do you use a brush, or a…"

She made a gesture. "Or a roller?" Wallsten helped out.

"Uh, again, both," Dean said.

Suddenly I heard the voice of Colapinto yelling out behind me. "Governor!" he said. "Did you bring your harmonica on this trip?"

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August 18, 2003

Victory for McDonald's PR

Friends of Animals

Dear *Nation* Readers,

It's a little awkward, says William Greider, to celebrate the world's largest fast-food corporation for a progressive political breakthrough ("Victory at McDonald's," August 5).

Make that more than a little.

Finally acknowledging the threats to human health, McDonald's has advised some of its meat suppliers to phase out growth-stimulating antibiotics.

Likewise, in response to Australia's obesity epidemic, the company launched a range of products to improve its nutritional image and woo vegetarians and health enthusiasts who once shunned it. "The initiative is all about driving more business into our restaurants," said McDonald's Australia CEO Guy Russo.

McDonald's self-promotion as a caring company hardly represents a "progressive political breakthrough"; it is, rather, inspired by profit-lust, and is precisely what one would expect from—to use William Greider's term—a global icon of cultural imperialism. Although Greider also praises McDonald's for working with humane and environmental groups to reform husbandry and slaughter methods, the real victory is for fast-food PR. If activists' tepid campaign to institute "partnerships" with multinational burger purveyors constitutes people power, then the true value of Greider's article lies in its revelation of the woeful ineffectiveness of progressive advocacy in recent years.

In the first place, what gives activists the idea that we must choose between the old fast food and the reformed fast food? This skirts the issue of lifestyle change: change that means eating a truly healthy and humane diet (yes—it's the "v" word) and supporting the products of local farmer's markets, independent chefs and the creators of traditional restaurants that celebrate diversity, rather than letting McDonald's consume us.

Moreover, the changes are just more of the same from the fast-food giant. Its profits continue to rely on the mass exploitation of workers, immeasurable animal suffering, the promotion of processed food wrapped in wasteful packaging and the mass manipulation of children. Meanwhile, the widespread use of antibiotics in animals has led to resistance scares. It would contravene the industry's best interest, in light of modern developments such as tobacco litigation, not to make an effort to address the issue.

Finally, note that the company will continue using antibiotics to compensate for the cramped and unnatural conditions of animals, at times under the guise of animal welfare. Discussing the company's Global Policy on Antibiotics, Bob Langert, Director of Social Responsibility for McDonald's, has stated: "Suppliers will still be able to use antibiotics for therapeutic purposes and disease prevention." (Agence France-Presse, "McDonald's nixes growth-promoting antibiotics in its food chain," June 19).

The public debate about what is "wrong with McDonald's" reached a new level in the British McLibel trial of the 1990s, and fast-food companies are on the defensive. But it is folly to think that such wrongs can be reversed, given the rate of human population growth combined with capitalism's inherent growth needs. In the end, attempts by McDonald's to turn critics into advertisers directly challenge the independence, the integrity and the humanity of those who oppose the commodification of animals and the environment, and strive to reclaim control over our lives and communities. The way forward does not lie in consumer groups' bellows for reform; nor does it lie in the legislative sphere. There is no need to wait and see if political candidates are "brave enough to talk about hamburgers" when real change can only come when we stop eating them. Is *The Nation* brave enough to talk about that?

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At other times during the tour Dean seemed to invite the reporters to get into something serious, and nobody in the pool would bite. On the last day, for instance, Dean made his daily plunge accompanied by a friend, the former mayor of Baltimore and an ex-classmate of Dean's from Yale, Kurt Schmoke.

Schmoke's presence on the flight ought to have been a big story among the press corps, for he is something of an anomaly in American politics. One of the country's most visible and outspoken black politicians, Schmoke was perhaps the first major politician in America to openly advocate the decriminalization of drug use. He once famously described the war on drugs as "our domestic Vietnam" and, before he left office in 1999, implemented a series of drug reforms in Baltimore aimed at the "medicalization" of the drug problem.

Considering the sensitivity of the drug issue in America, it was an act of some political bravery on Dean's part to bring Schmoke into the back of the plane with him. He was clearly trying to make a point, but no one among the reporters seemed interested.

"Do you believe nonviolent drug offenders should go to jail?" I asked.

"No," he said bluntly.

"That's it—no?" I said.

"Well," he said, "if you're talking about someone who's selling heroin in a school zone, sure, that's probably something you should go to jail for. But a guy who just has a problem, or gets busted a few times, no, he shouldn't go to jail. It's a medical issue."

"So how would you address the issue as President?" I said. "Most of the drug laws aren't federal laws."

"Well, that's true," he said. "We'd probably try block grants to give states incentives to finding alternatives to prison."

That this was not exactly the answer I was hoping for—the opening of federally sanctioned opium dens—was beside the point. It would be revolutionary for an American President, or even a major-party nominee, just to say that nonviolent drug offenders shouldn't go to jail. The breaking of that public taboo on a nationwide basis would be a major event, a huge step in halting the idiocy of a 2 million–strong prison population. But the press wasn't interested in making it happen, even though Dean was serving up the chance on a silver platter.

Then again, Dean wasn't exactly shouting it from the rooftops, either. He is, after all, a successful politician these days. And as was clear on the tour, a successful politician can only behave in a certain way.

Dean's supporters almost universally declare that they were attracted to the campaign because the governor is "different," "not the same old thing," "not a typical politician." Literally dozens of people I talked to along the way had the same feeling about him, ranging from teen students (Maggie Desmond, 17, of Waukesha, Wisconsin; she was with the Waukesha High School Liberals Club) to lawyers (Judie Rettelle, a volunteer manning the press entrance at the Falls Church, Virginia, event) to smart young filmmakers (Faith Radle, 31, of San Antonio, who produced a cool indie film called *Speeder Kills*). Even Cecil Andrus, the amiable and charming former governor of Idaho, insisted that Dean was a different kind of political creature.

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"I just don't go for those stereotypical politicians, the kind in the Senate," he told me, on the tarmac in Boise. "You know, with the..."

He made a gesture. "With the hairdos?" I asked.

Andrus, who's bald, laughed. "Well, if they've got hair at all, they're suspect," he said.

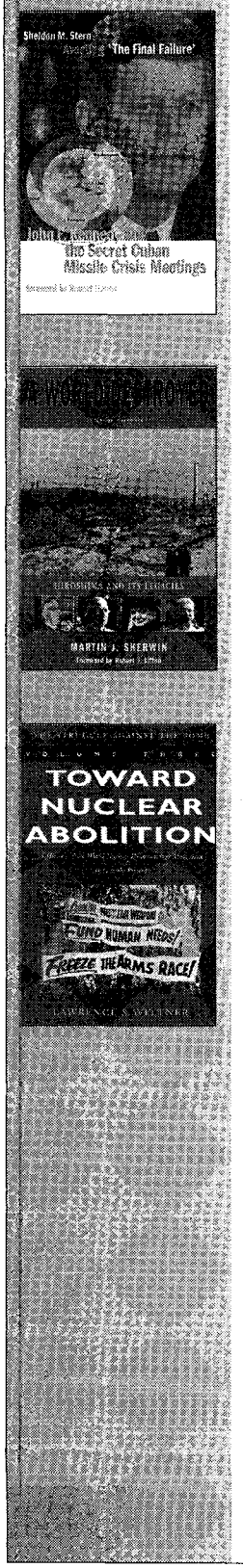
But it was hard not to notice that all the people surrounding Dean were veterans of the same-old, same-old Democratic Party. Dean campaign manager Joe Trippi is a longtime Democratic political consultant who has worked on the campaigns of Edward Kennedy, Walter Mondale and Gary Hart, and in 1988 he even worked for current Dean opponent Dick Gephardt. (In the latter campaign, Trippi was one of a group of "killer" consultants, along with people like David Doak, Bill Carrick and Robert Shrum, whose attack-dog political strategizing was immortalized in Richard Ben Cramer's book on the 1988 campaign, *What It Takes.*) Trip coordinator Matt Vogel worked for Gore, as did Kelly McMahon, Dana Singiser, Aram Kailian, Patricia Enright (who was Gore's deputy director of communications) and numerous other Dean operatives appearing at one time or another on the Sleepless Summer Tour.

The footprints of some schlock Democratic Party Svengali—probably Trippi—were visible at every turn in the Dean voyage. There was the Grassroots Express itself, of course. This was one of the details that I found hardest to reconcile with the widespread belief that Dean is "different" and "not a typical politician." When you name your campaign vehicle the Grassroots Express, while one of your opponents (John Edwards) has a bus named the Real Solutions Express and a candidate from a rival party (John McCain) four years ago had one called the Straight Talk Express...well, you haven't worked very hard to be different.

Then there was the Imageering 101 political staging, a subject of much snickering in the press pool. At most every stop Dean had a statistically accurate multicultural microcosm await his arrival on stage, usually against a background of a giant American flag. Milwaukee, the second stop on the tour, was the most painful: seventeen supporters of various races (in proper proportions: three blacks, two Hispanics, etc.), frozen and seemingly afraid to move or make a face against the backdrop of a mammoth Old Glory. Watching them wait for Dean gave me shivers; they looked like sausages nailed to a giant red, white and blue crucifix.

There were other details: the plastic grass, the strange fact (compelling to several reporters) that Dean rolled up his sleeves in public but rolled them down and buttoned them when relaxing on the plane, the odd fuzziness and vacuity of certain parts of Dean's stump speech... It was not lost on some of us, for instance, that his wooden campaign slogan, "Take America Back," was also used by two other former Trippi candidates: Gephardt in 1988 and Jerry Brown in 1992. Much of Dean's public presentation, in fact, is a rehash of other Democratic campaigns. He makes a joke about Bush being "all hat and no cattle," which was a laugh line in Gephardt's campaign speech earlier this year. And his closer line, "You have the power! You have the power! You have the power!" (delivered in the style of Jesse Jackson's "Keep Hope Alive!" bit) was a Gore line in 2000.

Nuclear Peril



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The funny thing about this was that when I pointed out these behaviors to Dean supporters, they rarely failed to admit to being turned off by them. At best they were indifferent, distantly aware that these gags were being staged for some other mystical personage "out there" who would be convinced by them.

"Does that do anything for you, you know, seeing an ethnically mixed bunch of people standing in front of a big flag?" I asked 18-year-old Megan Colvin in Milwaukee.

She shrugged. "Well, no," she said. "But I think he's trying to say something about diversity."

"But," I said, "he's trying to say it to you, isn't he?"

"I guess," she said.

Michael Hurwitz was a Dean staffer at the rally in Falls Church. I found him tending the back entrance to the stage, where, before the speech, the multicultural poster group was milling about, waiting to go on.

"Let me ask you a question," I said, pointing. "How does this work? Does someone on the staff say, 'I need two wheelchairs, three blacks and a cheerleader? Who does that job? And how do they pitch it to the actual people?"

He shrugged. "I think it's more like, they come forward on their own."

Dean followers didn't need the trimmings; most were there because they were antiwar and repulsed by the other Democrats who voted for the war. The glitz was for someone else, and that someone else, I soon realized, was on the plane with me.

As much as the reporters snickered about the campaign fakery, and occasionally cracked about it in print, there is no question that they were attracted to the big-campaign symbolism like moths to a lamp. To be full of shit in American politics is a signal to our political press that you are serious, and it was quite obvious that the most transparently meaningless or calculating aspects of Dean's behavior were what most impressed the Sleepless Summer press corps.

To wit: Most of the reports filed during the trip focused on the size of the crowds, the amount of money Dean has raised, the "feel of a general election campaign" surrounding his appearances and the sudden departure of his legendary "brusque, angry tone," which incidentally I never saw in the first place. A great many of the conversations among reporters on the plane centered around whether or not Dean had a chance to beat Bush, and these speculations—called horse-racing in the business—dominated the narratives of most of the articles, many of which wondered aloud whether Dean was "too far left" or would "moderate" his rhetoric in time for the real race.

When I asked the reporters on the plane what the value of this kind of reporting was, I got an interesting answer. No fewer than four journalists replied to the effect that unless the electability issue was addressed, "someone like Kucinich" might get the nomination.

"Hell, if it came down to a battle of position papers, Dennis Kucinich might win," laughed Jackson Baker of the *Memphis Flyer*, incidentally not a horse-racer and one of the true good guys on the plane.

"I think its value is that it helps to explain to the reader why I'm spending so much time with one candidate," said Mark Silva of the *Orlando Sentinel*. "He needs to know why I'm reporting so much on Howard Dean, as opposed to, say, Dennis Kucinich."

The next day, Silva ran a piece containing a quote from former Washington Governor Booth Gardner, comparing Howard Dean to Seabiscuit.

I was never much impressed by the "Howard Dean problem." To me personally, the whole issue seems ridiculous: I would vote for Count Dracula over George Bush. But it is a deflating thing to vote for a horse instead of a man. And "momentum" makes horses of them all. ■

LETTERS
CONTINUED

(Continued From Page 2)

College Park, Md.

■ Most of us college kids have been led to believe that our vote doesn't matter—but there's no lack of activism. A group of us here at the University of Maryland have been assailing the Republican governor over his budget cuts—our tuition is going up 21 percent next year, an additional $2,240 for me. This is the perfect point for a Democratic contender to make.

Most college students tend to be liberal. When 2,000 students turned out for an anti–Iraq war protest, the college Republicans had a counterprotest—of eight people. However, I was at the polls for an hour on Election Day 2002, and I saw about ten students vote. I'd reckon that this is because we've been made to feel "unnecessary." JERRY LEVINE

Somers, NY

■ As your 23-year-old liaison to "the young people," I'd like to give all your middle-aged and senior *Nation* readers an encouraging report from the frontlines of younger America: The times they are a-changin'. Young voters are shedding their politically apathetic skins and filling in the blanks left by our subpar educations. What is the reason for this shift? It is none other than our beloved President. When not-quite-President Bush promised to cut carbon dioxide emissions in his campaign speech and then did just the opposite, he sent a message to the young people of America: A healthy future doesn't mean squat to him. In fact, the "Clear Skies" Initiative is one in a series of euphemistically misnamed policies whose titles are the exact opposite of what they intend. Like Orwell's Ministry of Peace, Bush's Operation Iraqi "Freedom" is another example of a clever misnomer aimed at lying to America. Or how about the "Clean Water" Act? And my personal favorite, the "Jobs and Growth" tax cut.

That people might start paying attention is obviously something the extremists in the White House didn't count on. By lying to the American people they have inadvertently inspired a new wave of young people whose mantra seems to be "Screw You Back." Young people are most certainly uniting, and conservatives and republicratic "New Dems" better be scared, because *we're liberal and we're mad*. Let the success of Howard Dean's campaign attest to our potential—because the once-upon-a-time apathetic young Americans are the secret in Dean's sauce.

ERIKA BOETSCH

GEOGHEGAN REPLIES

Chicago

■ Hey, I'm not worried about the voting rate of young people who read *The Nation*. But what do our correspondents make of the drop in this rate to 35 percent among 21- to 24-year-olds, and the fact that it's still dropping? And that no one is reading a newspaper? I am glad, though, that so many readers are ready to rally the young. TOM GEOGHEGAN

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BOOKS & THE ARTS

She's Gotta Have It

CLAIRE DEDERER

SAPPHO'S LEAP.
By Erica Jong.
Norton. 316 pp. $24.95.

In his 1997 song "Highlands," Bob Dylan reports a conversation between himself and a waitress. "She says, You don't read women authors, do you?/... I said, you're way wrong./She says, which ones have you read, then?/I say, I read Erica Jong."

Erica Jong. The name closes the lyric like a punch line. There is perhaps no more woman-y woman author. Those four jouncing syllables connote a kind of vast female sexuality that seems almost ridiculously overwhelming. Paul Theroux has referred to a Jong heroine as a "mammoth pudenda," and while that's an awful thing to call someone, Theroux has hit upon just the squirmy kind of discomfort Jong inspires. As she herself has said, Jong will always be the woman who wrote "that book." *Fear of Flying*. It was the great sex novel of the 1970s.

It was also the great divorce novel of the 1970s. Dylan probably wasn't thinking of it, but his reference to Jong was particularly apt, as he wrote the great divorce album of the 1970s. While *Blood on the Tracks* was a descriptive portrait of a breakup, *Fear of Flying* was prescriptive. It was a novel that told women how to leave their husbands.

Between 1967 and 1977, the divorce rate in America doubled. In halter tops and patched jeans, women ran away from home. As a kid, I watched my mother's friends split with their husbands. Their houses were places of upheaval, with fathers visiting from nearby apartments, wine-drinking at odd hours and mothers going on long vacations. What I couldn't see was this: As the runaway wives humped along toward what appeared to be freedom, there was a figure beckoning from the other side, a figure who affirmed the decision to abandon the old life and attempt the new. This figure wasn't a new lover. It was Erica Jong.

Jong, at the time a respected poet, published *Fear of Flying* in 1973 with no idea of the furor she was about to unleash. By 1974, the book was a bestseller and went on to sell more than 10 million copies all over the world. It is still in print. But the numbers don't tell the story of the deep attachment women developed to Isadora Wing, the novel's protagonist, and to Jong herself. Novelist Lois Gould blurbed the hardback: "She'll take you farther from home than you ever dreamed you'd go." The idea of being gone turned out to be enormously appealing. A 1975 *Newsweek* profile of Jong gives an idea of the book's impact: "Runaway wives appear periodically on her doorstep, announcing their intention to move in with her."

Erica Jong tantalized women in the 1970s with the promise of a 'zipless fuck.' Divorce was suddenly easier to contemplate.

Fear of Flying's success has been attributed to its dirtiness. According to the critics, readers were lapping the book up as a kind of classy pornography. There are plenty of naughty bits: Isadora dreams, famously, of a "zipless fuck" with a perfect stranger, where in the moment of union, clothes fastenings simply melt away. She has capricious sex, in a variety of locations and positions. She reminisces about finger-fucking at age 13. She fantasizes about her husband performing cunnilingus during her period. But it wasn't sex, exactly, that made women's hair stand on end and conservatives' noses wrinkle (after all, bestseller lists at the time were sticky with novels by Harold Robbins and Jacqueline Susann). It was the unmistakable whiff of real life. *Fear of Flying* is filled with soft penises, missed orgasms, crabby partners—all the messiness of real sex. Here was someone—a female someone—telling the truth about sex. What was missing was the mythic glandularism of previous sexy fiction. What was missing was the porn. Jong spread not so much her legs, but the pages of her diary.

In fact, Jong's mining of her life for ma-

Claire Dederer, who lives in Seattle, writes frequently for the New York Times Book Review.

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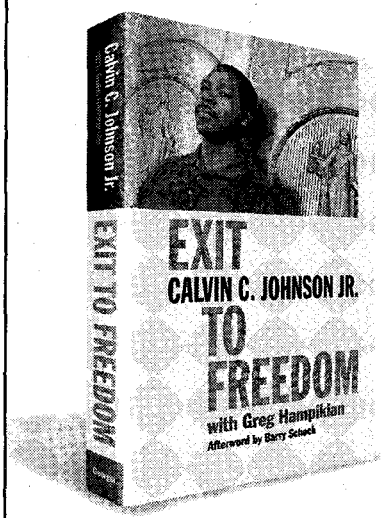

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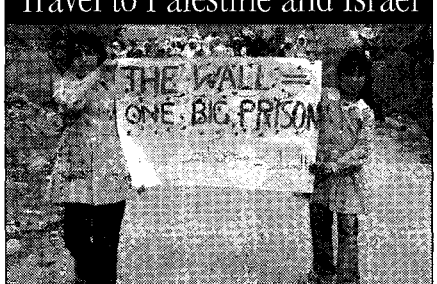

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terial has been her literary *idée fixe*. *Fear of Flying*—like its sequels *How to Save Your Own Life*, *Parachutes & Kisses* and *Any Woman's Blues*—closely hews to its author's life story, as told in her 1994 memoir, *Fear of Fifty*. Erica Mann was born to a Jewish, upper-middle-class Manhattan family with artistic pretensions. In high school, she engaged in plenty of finger-fucking, along with writing, painting and reading poetry. Isadora, in turn, tells us she "went to school and got better marks than the boys and painted and wrote and spent Saturdays doing still lifes at the Art Students League."

And so it goes, throughout the novel and into the seeming eternity of the three sequels. Erica married just out of Barnard to a lovely nut who promptly had a nervous breakdown; Isadora did the same. Erica thereafter married the Chinese psychiatrist Allan Jong; Isadora's second husband is the Chinese psychiatrist Bennett Wing. The Jongs attended a psychoanalytic conference in Vienna, where Erica met a sexy, walleyed British Laingian hippie analyst. The Wings attend a Viennese shrinks' conference, and Isadora giddily runs off with Adrian Goodlove, a sexy, walleyed etc. Adrian drags Isadora through the grotty campgrounds of Europe, where they discover that freedom's just another word for licentious sex quickly going stale. (Jong has allowed as how the adulterous camping spree never happened, pushing *Fear of Flying* from memoir-with-made-up-names to invented fiction.)

The next novel, *How to Save Your Own Life*, finds Isadora the author of a runaway bestseller, *Candida Confesses*, and the wife of the son of a famous Hollywood screenwriter. So it was for Jong, who, after the publication of *Fear of Flying*, hooked up with Howard Fast's son Jon and bought a Malibu love nest. Isadora tangles with some Hollywood types, while Jong, in a bid for inclusion in the annals of All-Time Terrible Ideas, sued producer Julia Phillips, ICM and Columbia Pictures over the rights to *Fear of Flying*.

Jong and Fast eventually moved back to Connecticut and had little Molly Jong-Fast. The two split soon thereafter, and Jong went on a single-lady stampede, ushering in a decade of affairs and substance abuse chronicled in *Parachutes & Kisses* and *Any Woman's Blues*. Isadora terminates there, alone but with a new serenity, while Jong went on to marry one more time.

A frank, relentless surveillance makes *Fear of Flying* Jong's best book. Her earlier poetry was unabashedly sexual and quite funny. ("Beware of the man who praises liberated women; he is planning to quit his job.") In *Fear of Flying*, that unsparing gaze is directed toward herself. The book is preoccupied with feminism and psychoanalysis, and these two great twentieth-century movements were engaged in essentially the same project: the discovery of the true self. Jong knew this discovery could be uncomfortable, as shown in this passage, where Isadora writes a letter to a book editor: "'Dear Mrs. Jones,' I began. But was that too presumptuous? Perhaps I should say 'Mrs. Jones'; the 'Dear' might be seen to be currying favor. How about no heading? Just launch into the letter? No. That was too stern."

It takes a whole lot of feminism, or psychoanalysis, or whatever's your poison, to be honest about dithering like an insecure fool over the salutation to a letter. *Fear of Flying* is characterized by this plunging into every aspect of Isadora's life and making a fetish out of honesty. Most famously, Jong turned this clear eye to sex. But sex is only one aspect of a book determined to blow the lid off, well, everything. *Fear of Flying*, so beautifully lacking in self-consciousness, was perhaps an unrepeatable performance. It has an adolescent quality to it, a spastic gesturing.

Isadora, like any sensible woman, takes feminism as an assumed good. But, like any sensible woman, Isadora rankles at feminism's strictures. Talking about her first husband (the crazy one), she sounds liberated: "A good woman would have given over her life to the care and feeding of her husband's madness. I was not a good woman. I had too many other things to do." But she's not quite there yet. Even as she falls in love with Adrian Goodlove, she knows she shouldn't rely on a man to solve her problems: "A really independent woman would go to the mountains alone and meditate—not take off with Adrian Goodlove in a battered Triumph." What Erica Jong knew is that most women feel like they ought to want the mountaintop, but really want the Triumph.

Feminism in the 1970s had a hard time reconciling these two ideas. You could have an empowered life, or you could have sex with men, but probably not both. Kate Millett, Andrea Dworkin and other movement leaders were skeptical about the heterosexual dynamic. But most women weren't. While they might be sick of the tyrannies of married life, they weren't sick of sex.

Jong's reflection of this reality won her readers where no one had thought to find them. She describes going on her first book tour and meeting "blackjack dealers in Reno who never read a novel until *Fear of Flying*." Itchy women who didn't know

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what they wanted found it in *Fear of Flying*, and what they found was, in the end, feminism. It was a feminism that wanted to look pretty. It was a feminism that gleefully had sex with men. It was a feminism that admitted to not being a tower of strength.

In fact, Isadora's feminism looks a lot like the twenty-first century. Passages from *Fear of Flying* sound so current they could be script treatments for *Sex and the City*. You can just picture Carrie pacing around in her boy-cut underpants, musing, "I could easily see the sterility of hopping from bed to bed and having shallow affairs with lots of shallow people. I had had the unutterably dismal experience of waking up in bed with a man I couldn't bear to talk to—and that was certainly no liberation either. But still, there just didn't seem to be any way to get the best of both exuberance and stability into your life." Then there'd be a subplot where Miranda sleeps with a bike messenger.

Fear of Flying both captured and propelled an important cultural moment. But it did not repeat itself. Jong's later Isadora books are marked by an obsessive self-regard. Once Jong had a notion of herself as an important representative of women's true feelings, she was doomed. The feelings she reported on began to seem constructed, premeditated. Critics were generally unimpressed. Here's Janet Maslin in a 1977 *Newsweek* review of Jong's second novel: "Isadora purports to be a fictional character, but she and Jong do seem to have been married to the same Chinese-American psychiatrist and engaged in the same well-publicized feud with that very same Hollywood producer who wants to film her first literary triumph.... 'How to Save Your Own Life'...is little more than a series of mean-spirited attacks on the author's own enemies."

Jong's historical novels have been more ambitious: *Fanny* retells *Tom Jones*, with a female heroine; *Serenissima* sends a movie star back in time to sixteenth-century Venice. These books are intelligently made, with lots of sprightly writing, but they always seem to be about the same full-speed-ahead, hypersexual woman: Erica Jong. She has gone out of her way to find heroines who embody the Jongian virtues of self-determination, keen sexuality and deep ambivalence, not least in her latest novel, *Sappho's Leap*. In Jong's fictional biography of the poetess, Sappho flees her native Lesbos and travels the ancient world from Egypt to Delphi, encountering seemingly every classical freak on offer, including Pegasus, the Amazons, the sirens and even Aesop. *Sappho's Leap* is deeply reminiscent of the Isadora Wing books: Sappho is yet another woman balancing motherhood, art, fame and a letch for younger lovers.

The book, lively throughout, works best when Sappho finds herself among the Amazons. Here Jong takes the opportunity to skewer the feminist debate she herself helped to engender. At first the Amazons seem to live in a kind of womyn's utopia: the beautiful warriors share childcare, ride winged horses and, like good liberals, cultivate peace within their ranks. But Amazonia holds up to investigation about as well as any collective. Closer examination reveals fissures: The Amazons kill off their boy babies; they're ruled by a bossy lady dictator; the horses' wings have lately shrunk to mere vestigial winglets. Sappho's solution? More lovin'! She tells the Amazons, "When Aphrodite inspires us, flowers bloom and maidens laugh and mares give birth to winged foals.... Without her mischief, nothing flies." This was the same message Isadora brought to the dour precincts of women's lib years ago. It's nice to see Jong still worrying the knot of feminism. On the other hand, recasting the most celebrated female poet of the ancient world

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as yet another Isadora demonstrates a certain presumption, or at least myopia.

Still, whatever might be said about Jong's writing, she has shown an uncanny knack for embodying the zeitgeist in her personal life. Reading her memoir you find she is almost hilariously a creature of her time. When *Fear of Flying* hit it big, she bought a Pacer. A Pacer! A 1976 "Newsmakers" paragraph in *Newsweek* revealed her "standing on her head and performing other acrobatics as a convert to yoga." Then she ran off to Malibu and bought a house with a waterbed and a hot tub, overlooking the Pacific. The 1980s found her ensconced in Connecticut, living the suburban good life like the parents in *Risky Business*. In the 1990s she was full of goddess-worship and AA spirituality. Now, as an aging baby boomer, Jong has developed a typically geriatric interest in antiquity with *Sappho's Leap*.

If Jong didn't get you with her writing, she'd still end up representing you simply by being the world's most visible liberated lady. My mother, an excellent reader and also a hater of sexy stuff, didn't like *Fear of Flying*. "Dull," she said, when I asked her about it. But get this: Around the time the book came out, my mother left my father for a hippie eight years her junior. Here's Jong, in a 1977 interview, talking about her second novel: "Many men are outraged by *How to Save Your Own Life* because it is an instance of a woman actually changing her life, and doing this awful thing of finding a younger man—a man with no money and a beard." Oh, boy, was that ever Larry, that last bit about no money and a beard. In fact, he had enough beard to braid it, and, what's more, he did. The four of us—my mother, Larry, my brother and myself—went off to live on a sailboat for the summer. There was a little hammock over my bunk where I kept my *Archie* comics. There was the smell of pot. There was rolling out my sleeping bag every night. This was freedom.

Now, my mom was not one of those women who read *Fear of Flying* and showed up on Erica Jong's doorstep in hopes of tea and sympathy (or white wine and giggly sex talk). She didn't use Jong as a how-to manual. But Jong normalized such behavior. She was blonde, she was unthreatening, she was featured in *Time* magazine and she was saying it's OK to go. Just go, she said. And they all did.

My mother and Larry are still together. It would be hard to say that what she did was a mistake. Larry turned out to be one of the great ones. He became, of all things, a tugboat captain. My brother and I had an adventurous childhood, which sounds like, and sometimes was, a Chinese curse. Possibilities proliferated ahead of us: more parents, more homes, more adventures. Unfortunately, these are not necessarily things children want. And what of my lovely father, left behind?

My mother married at 22; she had my older brother at 24. Reading Erica Jong reminded me that my mom's generation didn't hear a word about feminism until it was too late. When liberation began singing in their ears, they already had kids. They were unskilled. They didn't have careers. They had no idea what they were doing. But so beautiful was the singing, they left anyway. They had to go, once someone told them they could. ■

Shooting Wars

PETER WOLLEN

REGARDING THE PAIN OF OTHERS.
By Susan Sontag. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. 131 pp. $20.

BETWEEN THE EYES: Essays on Photography.
By David Levi Strauss. Aperture. 207 pp. $29.95.

In her new book, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Susan Sontag's focus is upon theaters of war and the way in which photographers have interpreted their role in the production of images of war, their moral responsibilities as spectators whose profession is to provide such images for the millions who stay at home, watch television, read the newspapers, leaf through magazines or frequent galleries and museums. She is particularly angered by those who see the spectacle of war and disaster as if it were a form of entertainment. "Ever since cameras were invented in 1839, photography has kept company with death." This dictum stopped me in my tracks when I first read it. But Sontag is right to associate the camera so closely with death, to note that "once the camera was emancipated from the tripod, truly portable, and equipped with a range finder and a variety of lenses that permitted unprecedented feats of close observation from a distant vantage point, picture-taking acquired an immediacy and authority greater than any verbal account in conveying the horror of mass-produced death."

Sontag unexpectedly begins her book with a chapter on Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas*, first published shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War. Woolf was particularly concerned with this issue because her beloved nephew, Julian Bell, had left England to join the antifascist forces in Spain, where he was killed driving an ambulance. "The next war" (as she thought of titling *Three Guineas*) seemed already to have embarked on its prologue. She asks, "Is it not possible that if we knew the truth about war, the glory of war would be scotched and crushed where it lies curled up in the rotten cabbage leaves of our prostituted fact-purveyors?" Woolf not only received packets of photographs from Spain, propaganda images for the Republican side, but also noted that "there is a very clear connection between culture and intellectual liberty and those photographs of dead bodies and ruined houses." She also included a series of photographs within the text of *Three Guineas*, featuring an army general, a herald with trumpeters, a procession of university professors, a bewigged judge with buckled shoes and finally an archbishop in a surplice. In Spain, war meant the deadly struggle against fascism. In England it meant a parade of ceremonial masculinity.

Sontag also points to early examples of war photography, such as Roger Fenton's images of the Crimean battlefield through which the Light Brigade galloped to the slaughter through the thunder of the guns, after "someone had blunder'd," as Tennyson put it in his elegy for the fallen. Fenton, she notes, sanitized the charge of the Light Brigade, preferring to show the disasters of war as "a dignified all-male group outing," in the tradition ironically proposed by Virginia Woolf, rather than a scene of carnage, as in Goya's disturbing images of war in Spain. Sontag herself includes no images in her book, preferring to deal in words, which appeal to the understanding rather than the appetite, to the mind rather

Peter Wollen teaches film studies at UCLA. His most recent book is Paris Hollywood: Writings on Film *(Verso).*

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than the eye. Verbal narratives, she points out, can make us understand, while "photographs do something else: they haunt us." We might well ask, as the critic Peter Conrad has done, whether sentiment is indeed more likely to crystallize around a photographic image than a verbal description, but surely a caption has the ability to place an image clearly within a narrative, whereas an unadorned image is open to any kind of specious interpretation.

It is in relation to this very issue that Sontag discusses a photograph taken by Ron Haviv during the war in Bosnia. She describes it in some detail and then concludes by noting that "in fact, the photograph tells us very little—except that war is hell, and that graceful young men with guns are capable of kicking overweight older women lying helpless, or already killed, in the head." On the other hand, Sontag never fully rules out the possibility that such a photograph, like Ron Haberle's photograph of the massacre of civilians at My Lai during the Vietnam War, might bolster opposition to war. In this context, Juan Goytisolo, who, like Sontag, went to Sarajevo during the war in Bosnia, asks the obvious question: Might people actually go to Bosnia hoping "to take photos of women and children packed into deportation trucks after a punctilious cleansing operation, who died from dehydration in Prijedor, like the Jews of Treblinka?" On the other hand, Goytisolo also notes that "photographers dispatched to Sarajevo and the war fronts have generally 'covered' the new with exemplary honesty and courage." Attitudes to photography, it seems, are doomed to imply a certain level of ambivalence.

In 1972 John Berger wrote an essay titled "Photographs of Agony" in which he discussed the case for and against photographic coverage of the horrors of war in Vietnam. Specifically he was interested in the many photographs taken by Don McCullin (published in newspapers and later collected in McCullin's book *The Destruction Business*). Berger noted that, while the press had long resisted the publication of war photographs that were considered to be shocking, it had now decided that they were acceptable. Berger suggests that there were two possible reasons for this change of attitude. First, certain newspapers had realized "that a large section of their readers are now aware of the horrors of war and want to be shown the truth," or, alternatively, they believed that "readers have become inured to violent images" and that the press must now compete in terms of "ever more violent sensationalism." Berger himself proposed that photographs of this type could provoke two contrasting attitudes. We are either filled with despair and indignation or engulfed by the suffering of others. Despair takes on the reality of the other's suffering, but to no purpose. "Indignation demands action" and yet, in this context, there is apparently no adequate action that would be viable or even available.

We have to accept, Berger concluded, that our response to such a photograph, as it "isolates a moment of agony," is bound to be felt as inadequate. Photographs of extreme agony, such as those taken by Don McCullin, demand our concern—and yet our response is likely to be one of feeling our "personal moral inadequacy," being overwhelmed by our sense that there is nothing plausible that we can do. In such a depressing situation, Berger suggests, we can simply shrug off our own sense of inadequacy as "only too familiar," or we might think of "performing a kind of penance"—perhaps with a contribution to a charity or an NGO. Berger, however, insists that since "the wars which we are shown are being fought directly or indirectly in 'our' name," they should require our urgently political response. Yet, in reality, such photographs are far more likely to

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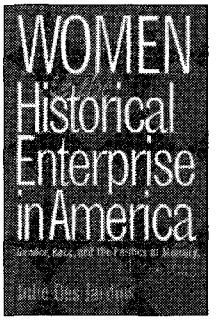

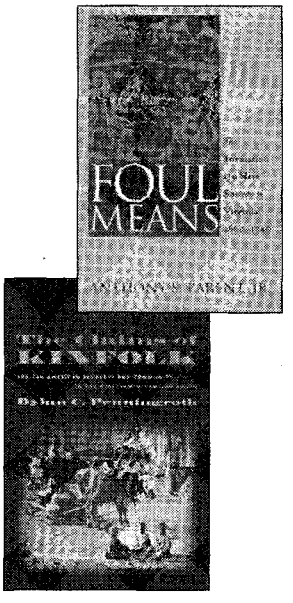

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have a depoliticizing effect, simply creating a sense of despair and helplessness. As Berger concludes: "That is why they can be published with impunity." Or, as Sontag puts it in *Regarding the Pain of Others*, "It's about how can we, and to what extent do we, take in the suffering of others? Do we take in anything?"

The specific context for this uncertainty is, of course, that of the Iraq war, which has generated its own seemingly endless supply of images, many triumphalist, others disturbing and even grotesque, some heart-rending. It is the photographs with "heart-rending subject matter" that Sontag sees as out of place when exhibited in an art gallery or a museum, through which viewers typically stroll without any real commitment to the images that are on the walls. She would prefer that they be published in a book, which traditionally demands more attention, and is more likely to provoke serious concern. As I wrote the previous sentence, I decided to get up and walk across the room to take down *The Lives of Lee Miller* from the bookshelf and then turn to the chapter titled "Lee's War"—a chapter that includes photographs of emergency surgery in a field hospital, bombs bursting on a fortress in France, Moroccan troops trudging through the snow toward the front, American infantry and tank crew billeting in a farmyard in Alsace, as well as the image of a dead German soldier for whom Lee Miller wrote her own caption: "This is a good German, he is dead. Artery forceps hang from his shattered wrists." On the facing page, there is a photograph of the daughter of the burgomaster of Leipzig, who killed herself as the Allies took the town.

Other images, the most gruesome, show scenes from the Nazi concentration camp at Dachau. Miller's caption reads: "Some of the troops, unable to comprehend the enormity of the suffering, thought the camp a grim propaganda stunt faked by their own side." It was this caption that convinced me that Sontag was right to insist on the primacy of the caption for understanding the circumstances and meanings of an image, in this case the horror experienced by the Allied troops and their inability to comprehend what they were seeing, whereas for the reader of Miller's book, all the images were not only placed but also dated, giving them a status as documents as well as an emotional effect as images. Even more disturbing is the photograph that Miller took in 1946, showing the former prime minister of Hungary, a notorious fascist, as he faced the firing squad. Amazingly, this image was published in *Vogue*. A crowd of onlookers is crammed in. A priest is in attendance. An upright stance. Four bullets. Without a text the image's status would be unclear, the emotional effect very different.

It is unfortunate that there has never, to my knowledge, been a collection of photographs from both sides of a war, comparable to the collection of paintings and other artworks published in *As Seen by Both Sides: American and Vietnamese Artists Look at the War*, a volume that, in fact, contains just five photographs, all of which, regrettably, were taken by Americans. One, taken by an amputee, shows a gun juxtaposed with artificial limbs that, out of context, seem to resemble weapons. Two others, taken by a photographer working for *Life* magazine, show two GIs, each of whom suffered from toxic chemical exposure, specifically Agent Orange. The other two images were the work of a GI, who was court-martialed, demoted and finally discharged. They show Ho Chi Minh's tomb in Hanoi, juxtaposed with a photograph of the American Embassy in Saigon/Ho Chi Minh City. There is also a painting, the work of Tin Ly, who later immigrated to the United States, where he made a series of paintings on the war. One of these is based on Eddie Adams's notorious photograph of General Loan holding his gun to a Vietcong prisoner's head immediately before his summary execution.

Photography is supposed to reveal the truths of war. But just what do war pictures tell us, and how can we be confident of their veracity?

Photography does seem to have become a kind of parasite on the body of war, whose credentials depend on its ability to deliver reality, to create images that reveal unquestionable truths. Yet these truths escape any normal principles of verification. The development of digital technology has made image alteration a very simple matter, even though images were being altered years before the new technology arrived. In 1993 a book titled *Unknown Artist* was published in Germany. It contains a number of photographs into which a stranger has been interpolated. In one photograph he appears as a member of the Surrealist group, looking at the camera over André Breton's shoulder. In another he stands next to Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, founder of Italian Futurism. In Alain Jaubert's book *Making People Disappear*, we are shown photographs from the USSR from which Trotsky and many others have indeed been removed. Similar vanishings and deceptions occur in photographs of Hitler with his close associates. No fewer than ten comrades vanished from Edgar Snow's photograph of Mao Tsetung with a group of friends and associates, leaving just three. One of the disappeared was Zhou En-lai's wife. Long before Photoshop and the new digital technology, photography, it seems, was far from a reliable medium.

The great merit of Sontag's book is that it questions the assumption that photographs tell the truth, as David Levi Strauss also does in his. Levi Strauss begins his book with a chapter-length discussion of the relation between aesthetics and politics in the field of photography. Essentially, he puts forward the proposition that there is no essential difference between photograph as document and photograph as artwork. Indeed, it is both possible and desirable for a photograph to have a political as well as an aesthetic dimension. In this context, he cites Walter Benjamin as believing that the way something is made (in this instance, a photograph) is as significant as its conventionally political aspect, its overt or covert message, so to speak. At the same time, Levi Strauss also endorses Benjamin's critique of "the way certain modish photographers proceed in order to make human misery an object of consumption." Levi Strauss is careful to distinguish between Benjamin's reference to "certain modish photographers" and his insistence, in contrast to Sontag, that photographs can be visually or conceptually compelling in themselves, arguing that photographic images can indeed be honest witnesses and persuasive rhetoricians, carrying a political message. The viewer's response should be characterized by complexity in its recognition of message and style and the intricate ways in which each interacts with the other.

The key figure in this ongoing debate over the nature of photography is the Brazilian photographer Sebastião Salgado. Levi Strauss sets out the case for the defense, citing Ingrid Sischy's *New Yorker* essay on Salgado ("Good Intentions") in which she protests, as Sontag might, that "Salgado is too busy with the compositional aspects of his pictures—and with finding 'grace' and 'beauty' in the twisted forms of his anguished subjects. And this beautification of tragedy results in pictures that ultimately reinforce our passivity toward the experience they reveal. To aestheticize

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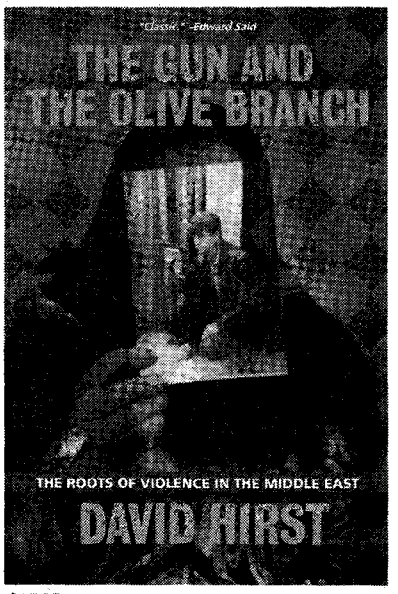

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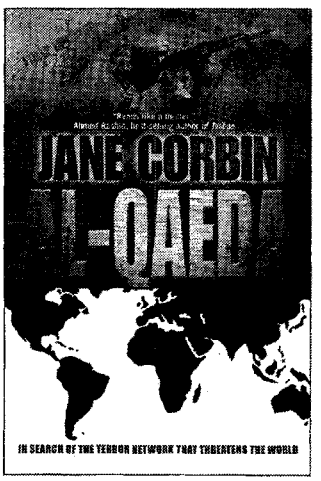

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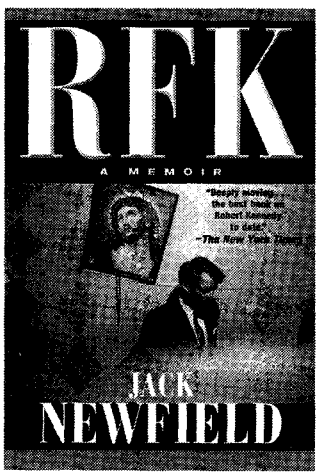

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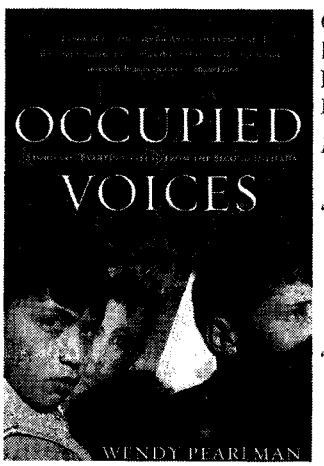

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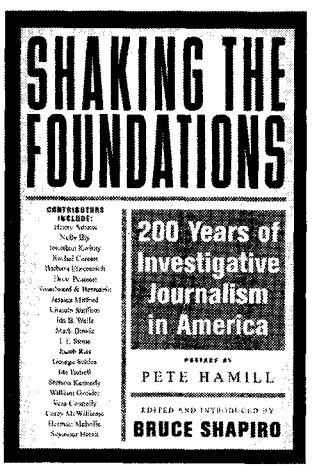

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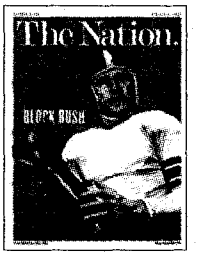

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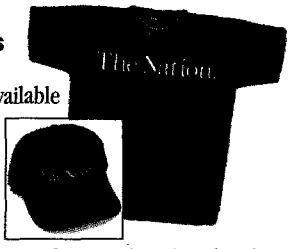

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tragedy is the fastest way to anesthetize the feelings of those who are witnessing it. Beauty is a call to admiration, not to action." Levi Strauss responds by arguing that it is "the disturbing quality of Salgado's work that so divides viewers," implying that it is wrong to accuse Salgado of aestheticizing his subjects—"the wretched of the earth," to borrow Frantz Fanon's phrase—and reject Salgado's work as exploitative *de haut en bas*. He insists that, as Salgado himself claims, the work pays a "kind of homage to the working class and the old ways of producing that are disappearing."

For Levi Strauss, Salgado's project is one of documenting the melancholy demise of the industrial proletariat and peasantry, already expelled from the technologically advanced countries of the world, yet still struggling to exist, undergoing exploitation and misery in the mines of India or Bolivia, refugee camps of Sudan or Laos, shipyards of Bangladesh, factories of Ukraine, battlefields of Angola, the cemeteries of Ethiopia or Brazil. Salgado's defenders see his photographs as images taken from inside a world of poverty and oppression, images shot from within with compassion, rather than as seen from the outside, with sugarcoating. What strikes me most about Salgado's photographs is that they are almost always photographs of groups or crowds—perhaps sixty or seventy miners in one image of workers in a Brazilian gold mine, including just one military policeman, right in the foreground, struggling to maintain control of his gun. In his images of the deserts of Ethiopia, Mali or Sudan, however, there are no such crowds, just single figures or couples or groups of four or six, emaciated, hungry, clinging, holding hands, sleeping, dying, carrying burdens and then, unexpectedly, dancing, celebrating, playing games, resting, walking in a procession, even enjoying a sauna.

Salgado began his professional career as an economist, interested in helping Third World countries develop their potential, working with the International Coffee Organization in London, traveling from country to country, while never losing touch with his roots in Brazil. Apparently it was while Salgado was visiting Africa on behalf of the ICO that he decided against simply being a social scientist, coming in from outside and then leaving as soon as possible. Instead, he would rather find ways to spend more time with the people themselves, the real focus of his interest. He borrowed a camera from his wife and, in Fred Ritchin's words, "found that he could depict them more vividly in photographs than in economic reports." Essentially, Salgado sees himself as serving the subjects of his photography. In his own words, "The picture is not made by the photographer, the picture is more good or less good in function of the relationship that you have with the people you photograph." When Salgado visited an Ethiopian refugee camp he stayed there for weeks, in order to better know the people he photographed.

It is fair, I think, to see Salgado's commitment to photography as an extension of his commitment to public service, particularly in relationship to the marginalized countries, economies and human work forces of the world, giving them not simply an image but also a sense of their own value, a belief in their right to be seen, even if they are not yet heard. On the other hand, it is not entirely surprising that Susan Sontag, while distancing herself from the usual criticisms of Salgado for his "sanctimonious Family of Man–style rhetoric," should express her own reservations about his work. The problem with his photographs, as she sees it, lies "in their focus on the powerless, reduced to their powerlessness." She notes that Salgado's subjects are never named, appearing thus not as individuals but as "representative instances of their occupations, their ethnicities, their plights." She also suggests, in sharp contrast to Levi Strauss, that "making suffering loom larger, by globalizing it, may spur people to think they ought to 'care' more," while also judging their sufferings and misfortunes as "too vast, too irrevocable, too epic, to be much changed by any local political intervention."

Both Sontag and Levi Strauss might agree, despite their differences, that it is important not only to interpret images but also to encourage new directions for photography, asking subjectivity to coexist with objectivity, aesthetics with politics. I was pleased that Levi Strauss mentioned Allan Sekula in the context of "social documentary," a category that would include his monumental *Fish Story*. Sekula, who sees his work as creating an "iconography of labour," uses images to both record and capture the human dimension of work patterns and conditions, and as a visual artist to capture that human dimension. "The dominant 'spectacle' with its seductive commodities and authoritative visual 'facts' could not exist without photographs or photographers," he notes, while insisting that documentary photography can indeed play a positive role if its subjects are fully respected. Doubtless the debate will continue. One thing is cer-

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tain—both Sontag's book and Levi Strauss's have asked crucial questions about the uneasy relationship that exists between photography, war and propaganda. As Sontag has said, "This is not just a question of images. It is a question of Americans thinking that war is acceptable, and a lot more than acceptable." ■

A Kinder, Gentler Fundamentalism

MICHAEL MASSING

THE TRANSFORMATION OF AMERICAN RELIGION: How We Actually Live Our Faith.
By Alan Wolfe. Free Press. 309 pp. $26.

In his 1998 book, *One Nation, After All*, Alan Wolfe chided liberals for their misapprehensions about the political attitudes of ordinary Americans. Drawing on interviews with 200 suburbanites, Wolfe argued that middle-class Americans are far more moderate in outlook than most intellectuals and journalists gave them credit for. The book—part of what Wolfe called the Middle Class Morality Project—contended that the whole notion of a "culture war" was a myth and that most Americans were instinctive pluralists with admirably tolerant positions on issues like race, homosexuality and welfare.

Now, in *The Transformation of American Religion*, Wolfe is extending that project into the realm of religion. By examining "how we actually live our faith," as his subtitle puts it, he is attempting to counter what he sees as a reflexive liberal disdain for America's faithful. A sociologist at Boston College (a Catholic institution with Jesuit leanings), Wolfe notes that while not a person of faith himself, he feels discomfort with the academic world and its "long tradition of intellectual snobbishness toward people of faith—a tradition, I have come to believe, that ends in forms of bigotry little different from religion at its worst moments."

To research this book, Wolfe dropped in on churches, synagogues and seminaries, and read numerous ethnographic studies of congregations. He came away convinced that the old image of religion as a fire-and-brimstone, Bible-thumping affair is obsolete. "If Jonathan Edwards were alive and well," he writes, "he would likely be appalled." Far from living in a world apart, "the faithful in the United States are remarkably like everyone else." Seeking to reassure those "who worry about faith's potential fanaticism," Wolfe argues that "we are all mainstream now." Ordinary people "who want nothing more than to serve their God and to be modern, American," have "more in common with you than you realize."

At a time when George Bush claims America is guided by Providence, when "God Bless America" resounds throughout the land, and when priests and ministers are denouncing gay marriage, this is an arresting thesis. Is it correct? Do intellectuals and journalists have too jaundiced a view of religion in America? Do they exaggerate its influence and power?

Some of Wolfe's findings are certainly eye-catching. "While more Americans than ever consider themselves born again," he writes, "the lord to whom they turn rarely gets angry and frequently strengthens self-esteem." Evangelical churches are warm and informal, offering programs ranging from daycare to athletic clubs; preachers deliver family-friendly sermons in which such traditional concerns as sin and damnation are rarely mentioned. Many evangelical churches feature rock music, with the lyrics projected on screens so that the uninitiated can participate. At an evangelical church outside New York, a women's group follows *Robert's Rules of Order* in the half-hour devoted to prayer, while at a Presbyterian church in Memphis the preacher delivers his sermons with the aid of PowerPoint.

In adopting such crowd-pleasing measures, Wolfe writes, churches are responding to the ever-growing restlessness among America's devout. Rather than remain attached to the faith into which they were born, as was long the case, Americans are constantly sampling new creeds and denominations in a bid to find the one that best suits their needs. In such an environment, churches face an iron imperative: "Personalize or die." Mainline Protestant churches that stick with stuffy old-style services are withering away; evangelical churches that "blend seamlessly with the most contemporary trends in American popular culture" are thriving.

Wolfe does a good job of drawing out the implications of this. While evangelicals frequently denounce sex and violence in the popular media, he observes, they themselves "flourish amidst the celebrity-drenched, lowest-common-denominator, highly sentimentalized world of romance novels, daytime soaps, NASCAR races, and Opry-knockoff music that dominates America's entertainment industry." This helps explain why the persistent campaigns by Christian morality groups to rein in Hollywood and the record companies so often fizzle; their constituents are major consumers of the stuff. "In every aspect of the religious life," Wolfe writes, "American faith has met American culture—and American culture has triumphed."

It's at this point that Wolfe's analysis goes badly off the tracks. Intent on showing how American culture has transformed religion, he ignores the many ways in which religion has transformed American culture. This is especially apparent in his treatment of evangelical Christianity. As some have observed, America seems in the midst of another "great awakening," one of those outbursts of religious fervor that periodically sweep the land, with evangelicals in the lead. Evangelicals are distinguished by their belief in the need to be spiritually reborn in order to attain salvation. They support vigorous proselytizing, a literalistic approach to the Bible and warm, enthusiastic forms of worship.

Wolfe is greatly cheered by their growth. Everywhere, he sees congregations that are dynamic, energetic, optimistic. The success of evangelicalism, he writes, "is due as much to its populistic and democratic urges...its determination to find out exactly what believers want and to offer it to them...as to certainties of faith." The evangelicals in his book all seem to be tolerant, moderate and nonjudgmental.

He is able to arrive at such a conclusion, however, only by glossing over—and sanitizing—some of the more disturbing trends in American religion. Take, for example, his discussion of Promise Keepers, the evangelical group that suddenly vaulted into public view a few years back with its mass rallies of men in football stadiums. The organization's adamant exclusion of women and its deep antipathy toward homosexuals attracted the suspicions not only of the news media but also

Michael Massing is writing a book about the Protestant Reformation.

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of such mainline Protestant groups as the Methodists and Presbyterians. Wolfe barely mentions this. Instead, he dwells on the small "accountability groups" that Promise Keepers sponsors as follow-ups to its mass rallies. These groups, he writes, "avoid discussions of any controversial topic." He cites one attendee as warning, "You've got to be really careful trying to turn Christian values into political action, for if you do, you have to enter the political arena, which is full of power games and dishonesty, and so on." For Wolfe, what's most significant about Promise Keepers is not its conservative political leanings but its ability to attract Christians out of traditional "institutional containers" and into new, "innovative" organizational forms.

Wolfe is similarly apologetic in his discussion of the status of women in evangelical Christianity. As he notes, most conservative Christian leaders see feminism as "immoral at its core," and women are excluded from most leadership positions. In practice, however, Wolfe insists, evangelical Christianity "encourages women to explore their own needs." As evidence, he cites the Parkview Evangelical Free Church in Texas. Here, women are prohibited not only from serving as pastors but also from teaching Sunday school. But Parkview does allow women-only Bible study groups, and Wolfe is much taken with a group leader named Angela. "Considering her outgoing personality and rhetorical abilities," he writes, such women "are clergy in everything but name." Angela's work, Wolfe adds, shows that "it is not a rebellion against the empowerment of females that has enabled conservative Christianity to grow by leaps and bounds; it is the unleashing of female power itself." Wolfe goes so far as to maintain that conservative Protestantism is promoting "the emergence of biblical feminists, women who try to combine their commitment to evangelical faith with an equally strong commitment to women's equality." Thus does a movement that denies women the right to teach Sunday school become, for Wolfe, an incubator of feminism.

Nowhere is Wolfe's selective approach more evident than in his discussion of abortion. According to opinion polls, roughly three-quarters of born-again Christians believe that abortion should be illegal in all or most circumstances, compared with fewer than half of non-born-again Americans. Wolfe makes no mention of this. In fact, he rarely mentions abortion at all. And, on the few occasions when he does, he makes it sound as if conservative Christians really don't care all that much about it. In one passage, for instance, he cites a man at a small group meeting who "wanted to bring up the issue of abortion. He did so, not by asking the group to discuss the topic, for that might have caused controversy, but by simply leaving a petition on a table for people to sign. Faith, for these believers, means walking with God; it does not mean arguing over theological (or moral and political) details." Thus does Wolfe obscure the huge impact that religion has had on the abortion debate in America.

The Transformation of American Religion curiously omits much key data. Nowhere, for instance, does it mention the proportion of American adults who consider themselves born-again. It's about 40 percent, or more than 60 million men and women—a fantastic number. Nor does the book draw on the abundant survey data that exist on their political attitudes. According to most surveys, evangelical Christians have much more conservative views than mainline Protestants or Catholics. This past summer, for instance, the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, in a survey on the impact of religion on American politics, found that 63 percent of white evangelical Protestants believe that the state of Israel is a fulfillment of the biblical prophecy about the Second Coming of Jesus, compared with just 21 percent of white mainline Protestants. Eighty-three percent were opposed to gay marriage, compared with 44 percent of mainline Protestants. Similarly, a far higher proportion of evangelicals supported the reelection of Bush. "Religion," the report observed, "is a critical factor these days in the public's thinking about contentious policy issues and political matters."

Compare this with the conclusions in *The Transformation of American Religion*. Religion, Wolfe asserts, plays little role in the American public square. "Just as Americans tend to vote for politicians who move toward the middle of the road," he writes, "they tend to be instinctive moderates when it comes to religion." In making such statements, Wolfe seems to be pursuing his own unstated political project, which is to portray ordinary Americans as reasonable and centrist while portraying liberals as intolerant and narrow-minded.

Wolfe is no doubt correct in asserting that many academics and journalists have a distorted view of religion in America. Given the huge impact evangelical Christians are having on America, there's an urgent need for more insight into their world. That world needs to be explored without condescension and cynicism—but also without the kind of whitewashing offered in *The Transformation of American Religion*. ■

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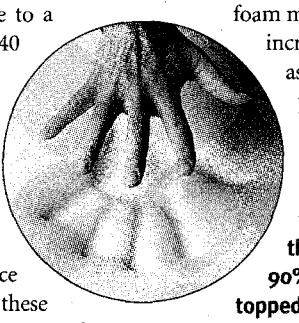

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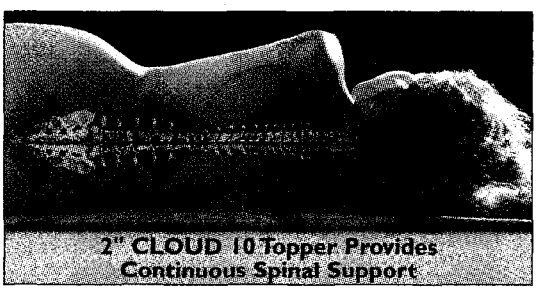

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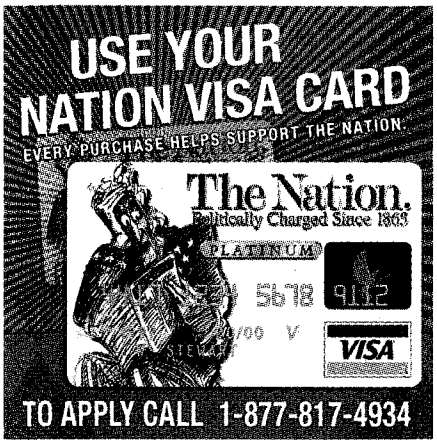

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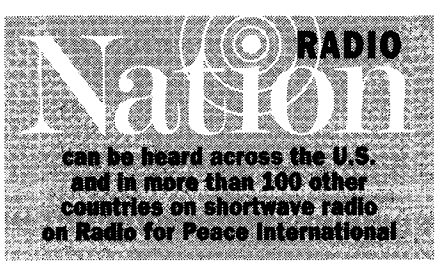
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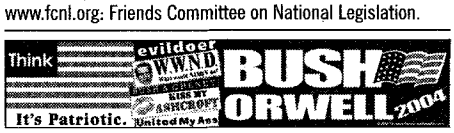

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NEW MONTCLAIR, NJ, *NATION* DISCUSSION GROUP is forming. First meeting: October 14, 2003, 7:30 PM, in Montclair. For further information please call Char or Mark at (973) 220-6142; or e-mail charloteeulette@aol.com.

HUNTINGTON, LI, NY, *NATION* DISCUSSION GROUP is looking for new members. Call John Valenti (631) 549-3926.

BRONX (RIVERDALE)/WESTCHESTER, NY, *NATION* DISCUSSION Group meets one afternoon a month. For further information please phone Florence Gold at (718) 549-1601.

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FORMER *NATION* INTERN AVAILABLE FOR RESEARCH, fact-checking, copy-editing and writing work. Experience includes radio, print and web journalism, documentary film research, event organizing and nonprofit activism. Fluent in French. References, résumé and published clips available on request. Contact Jonah Engle: call (917) 208-7756, e-mail jonahengle@yahoo.com.

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PUZZLE NO. 2909

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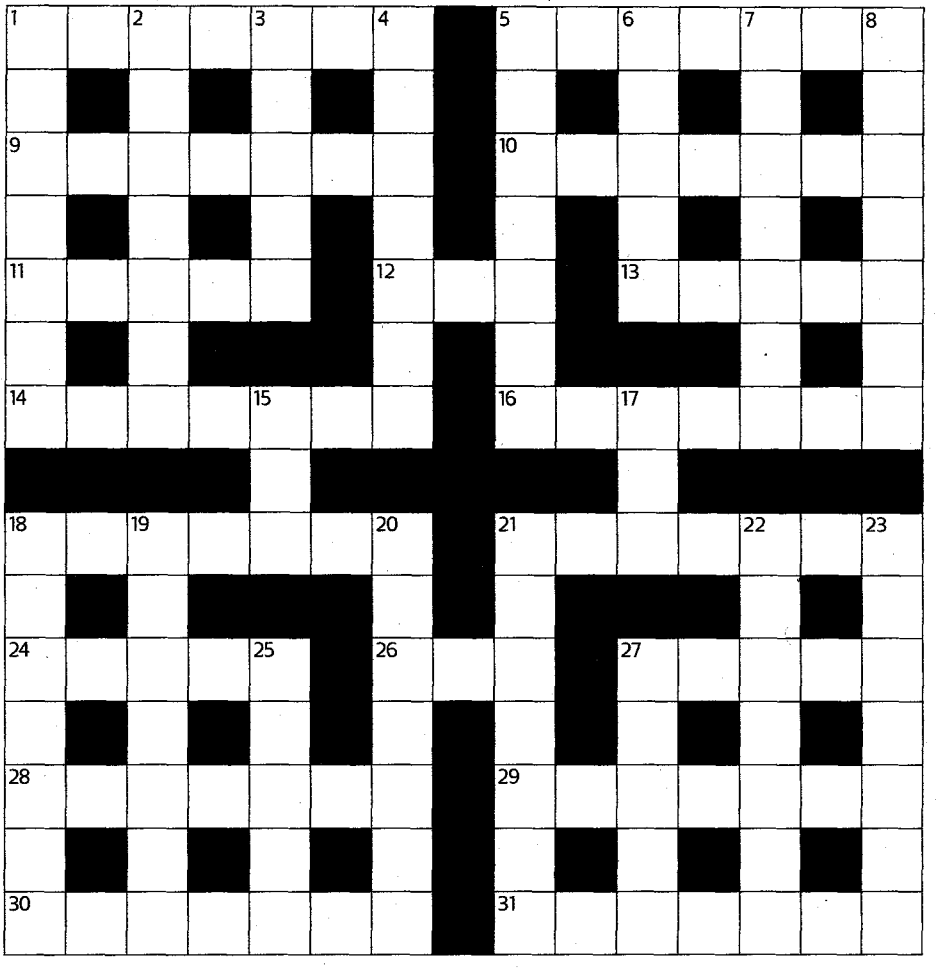

ACROSS

1 and **5** One way to do it is in bread—if you get unable to keep things straight. (14)

9 The awful rate on "petrol" might make you weep! (4,3)

10 If Gore entered this country he would have to head south and travel either east or west to reach a different place. (7)

11, 12 and **13** With them, one might either consult a dentist or a doctor. (5,3,5)

14 Effectively calmed down, with a couple of points old hat. (7)

16 Such as houseflies, mosquitoes and gnats take something out of the water at a bad rate. (7)

18 In Paris, my openers are just for primates. (7)

21 Wail softly and shake, that some consider this puzzle to be ambiguous, possibly… (7)

24, 26 and **27** across …like a cut-down lollipop. (5,3,5)

28 In general, you might find a way to make things bigger. (7)

29 Kick someone out of the office with one little mischief-maker apiece. (7)

30 See 15 down

31 Some fruit for the Women's Club? (7)

DOWN

1 The old warrior city's coming up with important people at one time. (7)

2 What's left of the fire in a flat-out condition might make one so embarassed! (7)

3 Wild goats? That's what people were wrapped up with in the old Senate! (5)

4 A bad sort, as well as a good writer. (7)

5 I would knead bread around it, if the locks were fixed this way. (7)

6 A bad pose taken by the story-teller. (5)

7 Pertaining to what the brash have a lot of? (7)

8 See 15

15 and **8** down, **30** across A lot of old writing is not quick to upset cases having bread products. (3,4,3,7)

17 What nosey people do when they have to open a container? (3)

18 Gushing streams to describe what the painters were, when old. (7)

19 Is an improving musician one? No, just getting older, possibly. (7)

20 It's the last word in short streets—but flowers wouldn't be the same without them. (7)

21 Do they carry bags of course? Or perhaps just tea bags? (7)

22 What old medics used to use like a brace and bit—being very French about a way to ridicule someone. (7)

23 What one sometimes does cold, with old-time songs. (7)

25 Where a yodel might go a long ways. (5)

27 Rather short for a person who appears on the stage without talking—but is commonly very good. (5)

SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 2908

D	E	A	D	W	O	O	D		C	L	A	M	U	P
A		L		I		R			A		A			O
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P		O		K		N		H		T		S		N
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		R	E	P	U	B	L	I	C	A	T	I	O	N
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H	Y	P	O	C	H	O	N	D	R	I	A	C		
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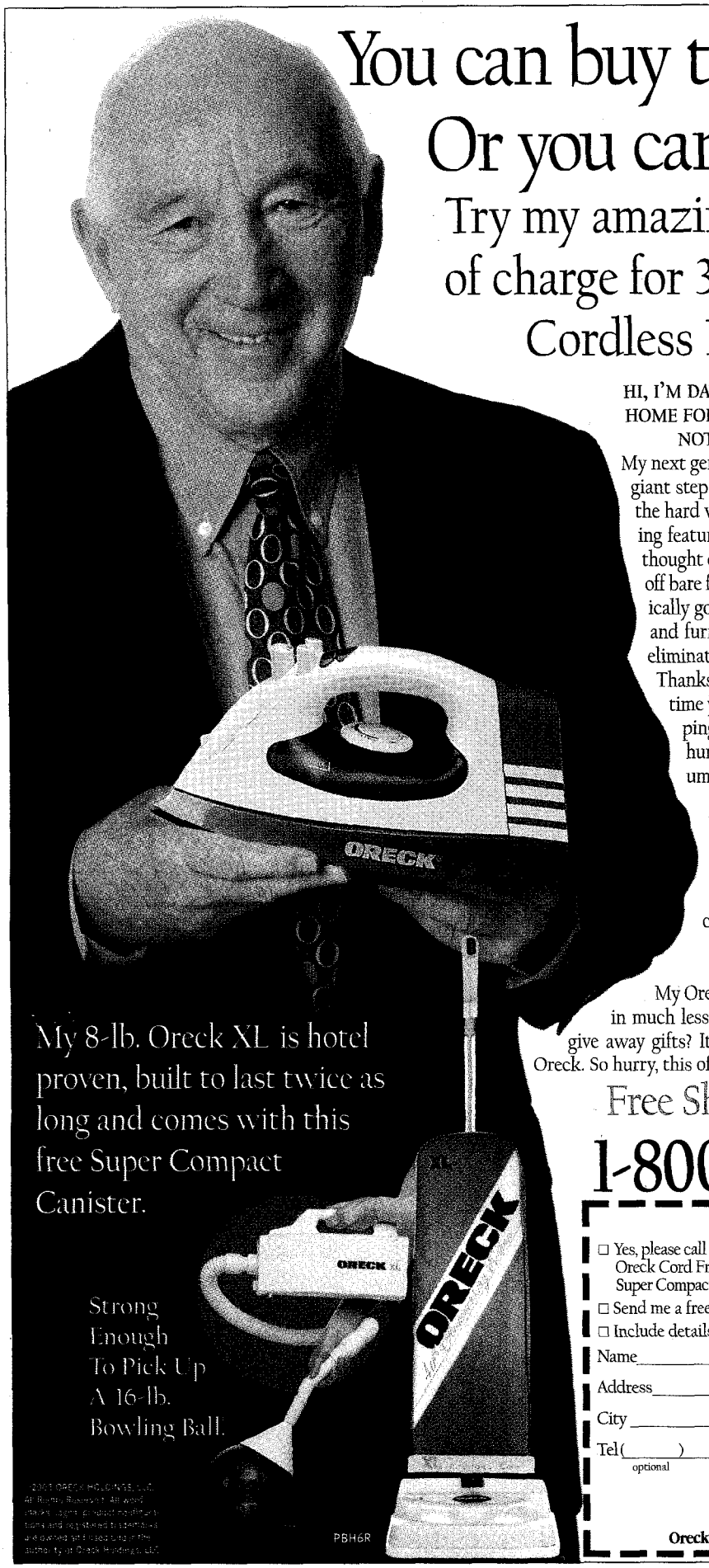
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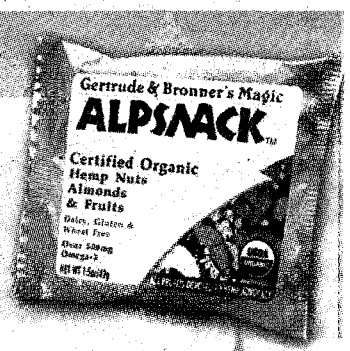

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